

***A Mystical Encounter of a Dominican Friar, Serge de  
Beaurecueil (d. 2005), and a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī, ‘Abdullāh  
Anṣārī of Herāt (d. 1089)***

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## ***Abstract***

This study examines the life and scholarship of a French Dominican friar, Serge de Beaurecueil (1917 - 2005). His life time investigation of the mystical dimensions of Islam centered around the life and corpus attributed to the 11<sup>th</sup> century Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī shaykh ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt (1006 - 1089). The thrust of our argument is that this erudite and mystical conversation with the work of the Pīr of Herāt is a methodology and a theology of dialogue with the religious other. This mystical and prophetic journey combines the Ashramic spirituality of Jules Monchanin and Henry Le Saux in India, a master-disciple relations, the ethical demands of interfaith dialogue, and finally testifies to the hidden and abiding presence of God among the downtrodden of Kabul. Also, de Beaurecueil’s life ascertains the rich and varied heritage of Dominican spirituality and lays bare the conundrums of interfaith encounter.

The introduction sets the stage for the friar’s mystical and prophetic life among Muslims. The first two chapters are biographical. They scrutinize the formation period and professional life of both de Beaurecueil and Anṣārī. The following two chapters describe de Beaurecueil intellectual and spiritual growth. His erudition on the corpus of Anṣārī and his *praxis mystica* fit perfectly the Dominican tradition of search for Truth (*Veritas*) and *contemplata aliis tradere*. The last chapter attempts to couch in a philosophical language a mystical encounter. Even though de Beaurecueil’s *praxis mystica* is both attractive and intimidating, his life is a bold testimony to the demanding complexities and rich opportunities of Christian-Muslim mystical encounter.

## *Acknowledgment*

First, to the memory of three unparalleled Dominican friars:

William Cenkner (died on August 8, 2003)  
 Shigeto Oshida (died on November 6, 2003)  
 James Campbell (died on February 11, 2004)

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### ***Note on Transliteration and Style***

In general, Arabic words are rendered with complete diacritical marks. However, Islamic terms commonly used in English such as Allah or Islam will follow the Oxford Dictionary transliteration without neither over-bars nor under -dots.

The Arabic letter ‘*ayn* is represented by an open single quote (‘) while the closing single mark (’) denotes the *hamza* consonant.

Dates are given in C. E. (the common area) but in some instances such as direct quotations, both A.H./C.E. format are given. (A.H. corresponds to the Islamic Hijra calendar).

## ***Table of Abbreviations***

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <i>APF</i>            | <i>Archives de la Province Dominicaine de France</i>                 |
| <i>AHR</i>            | <i>American Historical Review</i>                                    |
| <i>BIFAO</i>          | <i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale</i>       |
| <i>CNRS</i>           | <i>Centre National de Recherche Scientifique</i>                     |
| <i>EBr</i>            | <i>Encyclopedia Britannica</i>                                       |
| <i>Elr</i>            | <i>Encyclopedia Iranica</i>  |
| <i>El<sup>2</sup></i> | <i>Encyclopedia of Islam, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition</i>                 |
| <i>EQ</i>             | <i>Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān</i>                                    |
| <i>ICMR</i>           | <i>Islam and Christian Muslim Relations</i>                          |
| <i>AIDEO</i>          | <i>Archives de l'Institut Dominicain des Études Orientales</i>       |
| <i>IDEO</i>           | <i>Institut Dominicain des Études Orientales</i>                     |
| <i>IFAO</i>           | <i>Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale</i>                     |
| <i>IQ</i>             | <i>Islamic Quarterly</i>   |
| <i>JIS</i>            | <i>Journal of Islamic Studies</i>                                    |
| <i>JRAS</i>           | <i>Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland</i> |
| <i>MD</i>             | <i>Mémoire Dominicaine</i>   |
| <i>MIDEO</i>          | <i>Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain des Études Orientales</i>       |
| <i>MW</i>             | <i>The Muslim World</i>  |
| <i>NCE</i>            | <i>The New Catholic Encyclopedia</i>                                 |
| <i>NCR</i>            | <i>National Catholic Reporter</i>                                    |
| <i>REI</i>            | <i>Revue des Études Islamiques</i>                                   |
| <i>RT</i>             | <i>Revue Thomiste</i>  |

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## ***Introduction***

*D'autre part, nous serions ainsi rappelés à cette implacable loi de l'hospitalité: l'hôte qui reçoit (host), celui qui accueille l'hôte invité ou reçu (guest), l'hôte accueillant qui se croit propriétaire des lieux, c'est en vérité un hôte reçu dans sa propre maison. Il reçoit l'hospitalité qu'il offre dans sa maison, il la reçoit de sa propre maison- qui au fond ne lui appartient pas. L'hôte comme host est un guest.<sup>1</sup>*

Are there locks upon our hearts?" Are we adequately susceptible, in our thinking and our relationships, to the content and inward force of the non-Christian other? In particular do we erect the abiding and unmistakable uniqueness of Christ – into an UnChristlike and therefore unChristian inattention and depreciation? Since Christianity is by definition "good news" it would seem fair to say that there must be a capacity for hospitality in its custodians. We are the servants of the faith with a universal invitation. Surely its openness to discovery by men [and women] requires an openness to all men [and women] on the part of us its servants. The whole Christian relation in this generation to the nascent faiths and ardently self-responsible nations must be one of the fullest and wisest hospitality of mind to their heritage and their hopes. For are not we ourselves the guests of God in Christ?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas* (Paris: Galilée, 1997), 79.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Cragg, "The Hinge and the Lock," *MW* 47 (1957): 269.

Although a founding member of the IDEO along with George C. Anawati (d. 1994) and Jacques Jomier (d. 2008), the Dominican friar, Serge de Laugier de Beaurecueil (d. 2005) is unfortunately not well known among French Catholic scholars of Islamic mystical traditions.<sup>3</sup> Unlike Anawati and Jomier, the Dominican Order and the IDEO have not given due and full attention to de Beaurecueil's unique path and scholarship. This dissertation is the first attempt to give a comprehensive and systematic analysis of his life and contribution to the varied heritage of Dominican spirituality. The major themes of this study are: first, his scholarship on the life and works attributed to his master-teacher, Khwāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī (d. 1089), a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī<sup>4</sup> of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Herāt, also known as the Pīr-of Herāt or Pīr-e ṭarīqat; second, his radical understanding of hospitality from and to, and dialogue with the religious other; and third, his *praxis mystica*. This latter aspect is the thrust and culmination of the friar's mystical conversation with and hermeneutics of Anṣārī's works. To be clear, Anṣārī is not the subject of this dissertation, but rather, this

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<sup>3</sup> Four years after the death of de Beaurecueil (d. 2005), a conference entitled, «*Colloque: hommage à Serge de Beaurecueil*, » was held at the Abbey of Sylvanès (France) from October 9 to 11, 2009. Among the participants, a few notable names: the current Master General of the Dominican Order, Bruno Cadoré, (then prior Provincial of the Dominican province of France), Jean Jacques Pérennès, the Secretary General of the IDEO in Cairo; André Gouzes, a renowned liturgist and sacred song writer; Atiq Rahimi, French-Afghan writer and film maker, director of the documentary movie, *Nous avons partagé le pain et sel*; Ehsān Mehrangais and Olivier Villemeaud, President and Secretary General of the NGO Afghanistan Demain, respectively; Ravān Farhādī, the former ambassador of Afghanistan to France and the UN; and Eve Feuillebois, professor at the University of Sorbonne, Paris III. The papers given at the colloquium are not published, but the author had access to them. We will refer to these articles in this study as «*Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009*» A brief introduction to a few of the participants will show the importance of the colloquium. Gouzes is a Dominican priest who turned the twelfth-century Cistercian abbey in Sylvanès into a modern liturgical and cultural center in the south of France. De Beaurecueil was buried at the Abbey of Sylvanès by Gouzes. (See his tomb, Table 2), Atiq Rahimi won several prizes. A movie based on Rahimi's Dari-Persian book *Earth and Ashes* won the *Prix du Regard vers l'Avenir* at the 2004 Cannes Film festival, and his book *Syngue Sabour* (Stone of Patience) won the prestigious *Prix Goncourt* in 2008. Ehsān Mehrangais, Wahed Gardji, Farouk Païenda, and Mirdād Pedarī were at the conference, and had lived with de Beaurecueil at *La Maison d'Abraham* in Kabul. His book, *Mes enfants de Kaboul*, refers to them. See Chapter 4 for complete detailed on the house. Other participants were, Etienne Gille, who edited *Lettres d'Afghanistan de Serge de Beaurecueil*. Les Petites Soeurs de Jesus sent an article from Kabul to contribute to the event. They knew de Beaurecueil for most of his life in Kabul. The little sisters of Jesus came to his house for Eucharist celebration once a week and he went to their convent another day of the week.

<sup>4</sup> See chapter 2 for a full treatment of Ḥanbalī Ṣūfism.



study seeks to investigate how the encounter of the Pīr of Herāt and the Dominican friar, ‘*ces deux hommes de Dieu*,’ transformed de Beaurecueil’s orthopraxis, enriched his theological perspectives and Christian-Catholic mystical imagination. This mystical encounter raises the following questions: how does de Beaurecueil’s scholarship on the mystical dimensions of Islam influence and transform his religious *weltanschauung*? What kind of Catholic theology of religions is attested in his *praxis mystica*? Also, our investigation situates de Beaurecueil in the tradition of important *iranisant* and *islamisant* in French scholarship and particularly in the Dominican Order.

In addition, the life and thought of de Beaurecueil is an invaluable second source material and a fine hermeneutic of the corpus attributed to Anṣārī. Robert Caspar calls his work “a scientific monograph with theological perspectives.”<sup>5</sup> To the best of our knowledge, no scholar of Islamic mystical traditions in the western languages has devoted over half a century of his or her entire scholarship to the Pīr of Herāt. At times, a secondary source opens unexpected windows into a primary source and allows a better interpretation and grasp of a historical figure. De Beaurecueil’s mystical hermeneutic does not pretend to understand the master’s work better than he understood his corpus or himself, and thereby offer a perennial interpretation without a temporal horizon. To be clear, de Beaurecueil has never claimed such position. Rather, his scholarship falls squarely within the larger tradition of French Catholic scholars of the mystical dimensions of Islam and particularly the Dominican Order’s context of Islamic studies. This research is inspired by the work of Youakim Moubarac (d. 1995) and Herbert Mason on Louis Massignon (d. 1962), Tom Cheetham’s investigation of Henri Corbin’s (d. 1978) scholarship, Patrick Laude’s

*Pathways to an Inner Islam*, René Voillaume’s books on the life of Charles de Foucauld (d.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Caspar, “Muslim Mysticism: Tendencies in Recent Research,” in *Studies on Islam*, ed. Merlin L. Swartz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 178.

1916) and Maurice Bormann's *Les prophètes du dialogue Islamo-Chrétien*, to name but a few.<sup>6</sup> De Beaurecueil's legacy belongs to a particular context and his contribution falls within the vast and complex field of classical Islamic mysticism. His unique path reads like the diary of a Dominican friar's love affair with a far away land, a captivating master-teacher relationship, and more importantly a transformative mystical encounter with the religious other. The French Dominican friar's lifetime theological and mystical conversation with Anṣārī's work offers a stellar example of a theology of dialogue.<sup>7</sup> This mystical path combines the following aspects: first, the Ashramic spirituality of Abbé Jules Monchanin (d. 1957), the Benedictines Henri Le Saux (d. 1973) and Bede Griffiths (d. 1993); second, the kind of disciple-master relationship exemplified by Louis Massignon's study of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj's (d. 922) work; third, the ethical dimension of Christian discipleship as a necessary component of interfaith dialogue; and fourth, an attempt to emulate the hidden life of Jesus of Nazareth who lived among the poor and to welcome people from all walks of life. In this latter case, de Beaurecueil's life in Kabul resembles Charles de Foucauld's (d. 1916) vocation among the Tuaregs of Tamanrasset (Algeria), even though the two men were significantly different. Both men lived their Christian discipleship in predominantly Muslim lands. For de Beaurecueil the ethical dimension of his mystical conversation with Anṣārī compelled him to abandon his chair of professor at

<sup>6</sup> See *Louis Massignon: Opera Minora*. 4 vols. Collected texts presented by Youakim Moubarac, (Beirut: Dar al-Maaref, 1963); Youakim Moubarac, *L'oeuvre de Louis Massignon*, (Beyrouth: Édition du Cénacle Libanais, 1972); Herbert Mason, *Memoir of a Friend: Louis Massignon* (Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1988); *Massignon: chronique d'une amitié*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1990); and *Testimonies and Reflections, Essays of Louis Massignon* (Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1989); Tom Cheetham, *The World Turned Inside Out: Henry Corbin and Islamic Mysticism*, (Woodstock, CT: Spring Journal Books, 2003). Partick Laude, *Pathways to an Inner Islam: Massignon, Corbin, Guénon and Schuon*. (Albany: State University of New York, 2010); Maurice Bormann *Prophètes du dialogue Islamo-Chrétien: Louis Massignon, Jean-Mohammed Abd el-Jalil, Louis Gardet, Georges C. Anawati*. (Paris: Cerf, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> This study is not interested in the threefold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism or pluralism, nor trying to solve the quarrels of catholic theologies of religions. The thought of Karl Rahner, Jacques Dupuis, Claude Geffré, John Hick, Paul Knitter, Gavin D'Costa, Michael Barnes, to name but a few, will be equally useful. No preference is given to one particular theologian. Our goal is to investigate the life and work of a Dominican friar whose life exemplifies an encounter of two faith traditions.

the University of Kabul in 1965 and attend to Afghan street children by opening a house of hospitality, called, *La Maison d'Abraham*. This study shows that the French Dominican friar gives us a magnificent and luminous meditation on the hidden and abiding presence of God among Kabul's street children. In a few words, de Beaurecueil's life was «*un témoignage bouleversant d'humanité.*»

Like many religious communities in the Roman Church, the Dominicans did not wait for the Second Vatican Council to engage the religious other.<sup>8</sup> De Beaurecueil started his work on Anṣārī in 1946 and by the time Vatican II convened, from October 11, 1963 to December 8, 1965, he had already visited Afghanistan twice, lived in Cairo for seventeen years and published widely. In 1963, he left Cairo to take up residence in Kabul.

Nonetheless, Vatican II was a major historical event in the Roman Catholic Church with respect to non-Christians and their religions; but also official support for Catholic theologians like de Beaurecueil living in the midst of Muslims or engaged in interfaith works. The Church broke with her previous outlook on the world, in the sense that she no longer placed herself over and against but in relationship with the other: other Christian communities, major world religions and humanity at large. The Council had to reconcile its universalist vision with the knowledge that many Catholic religious and lay communities live in sometimes powerfully non-Christian and even anti-Christian environments. *Nostra Aetate*, the most famous document on this matter, began as an attempt to heal the first great separation – Christian and Jewish – and the Catholic Church's long history of anti-Jewish rhetoric and actions, but then reached out to Islam and other major faith traditions. With regard to the Council's teachings on other faith traditions, two distinct issues were at stake.

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<sup>8</sup> On Vatican II's documents related to our topic see: Michael Barnes s.j., *Theology and the Dialogue of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 32 - 45; Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 158 - 179; Claude Geffré, *De Babel à Pentecôte: Essais de théologie interreligieuse* (Paris: Cerf, 2006), 41 - 57.

The first focused on the individual salvation of persons belonging to other faith traditions, while the second dealt with the meaning of these faith traditions in God's providence for humanity with the role other religions play in the salvation of their members. The Council was a watershed event concerning many aspects of Catholic theology,<sup>9</sup> but less so for interreligious matters. The Council's stand point was primarily pastoral and as far as other faith traditions were concerned, Vatican II sought to foster a new attitude of mutual understanding, esteem, dialogue and cooperation between Catholics and members of other religions. The following conciliar documents, *Lumen Gentium* (16 and 17) *Nostra Aetate* (1 and 2), *Ad Gentes* (3, 9 and 11), and *Gaudium et Spes* (22) contain the main teachings dealing with other religions and the world at large.<sup>10</sup> Vatican II introduced into the Church a receptive attitude towards the world, with new ways of speaking of salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church. *Nostra Aetate* recognized the positive values enshrined in other faith traditions, and placed the Church with other religions in the broader context of the common origin and destiny of humanity in God, and the search common to all religions to answer ultimate questions that beset the human spirit. *Nostra Aetate* states:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. With sincere respect she looks on those ways of conduct and life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing on many points from what she herself holds and teaches, yet not rarely reflect a ray of that Truth (*radium illius Veritatis*) which enlightens all human beings. ... And so the Church has this exhortation for her children: prudently and lovingly, through dialogue (*colloquia*) and collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness to the Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral good, as well as the socio-cultural values found among them.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 716 - 727. Rahner describes Pope John XXIII's *aggiornamento* or his extraordinary exercise in updating the Roman Catholic Church as "the first major official event in which the Church actualized itself precisely as a world church."

<sup>10</sup> See Justin Flannery, *Vatican II. The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, vol.1 (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> *Nostra Aetate*, no. 1 and 2.

Then concerning Muslims, the document reads:

The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself, merciful and all-powerful, the creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men [and women]; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother, at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.<sup>12</sup>

Undeniably Vatican II opened doors for a better relationship between Catholics and other religions and their members as well as encouraged the study of other faiths. The council's assessment of religious diversity was primarily descriptive, and various expressions taken from previous documents and theologies, suffer a certain vagueness and ambiguity,<sup>13</sup> and more importantly, Vatican II did not offer a clear theology of religions. Notwithstanding the council's receptive view of other religions, its teachings remains strongly "ecclesiocentric"<sup>14</sup> Dupuis remark:

The Church seems to recognize as positive and good in other religions only such elements as are found in it superabundantly. Are the 'rays' of truth present in them necessarily to be related to the fullness of it possessed by the Church? Or would the declaration be prepared to acknowledge in other religions the presence of rays of truth not found in the Church? The Church's way of thinking remains 'egocentric.'<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Nostra Aetate*, no. 3.

<sup>13</sup> For example, the Church "rejects nothing of those things which are holy and true which enlightens everyone" but nothing is said about what these elements of truth and holiness might be. Instead the next line read, "Yet, she proclaims, and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail Christ who is the way, the truth and the life."

<sup>14</sup> Henri Maurier, "Lecture de la déclaration par un missionnaire d'Afrique," *Les relations de l'Église avec les religions non-Chrétiennes*, ed. A. M. Henry, (Paris: Cerf, 1966), 119 - 160.

<sup>15</sup> Dupuis, *Toward*, 169.

Vatican II and post-conciliar debates show clearly that these documents were but the first step of a very long journey into a Catholic theology of religions. To this day, a Catholic theology of religions is still in the making. De Beaurecueil's journey will clearly indicate that the 'rays of truth' are found in the mystical tradition of a religious other, in his case, a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī.

### ***I Religious otherness***

How can the context of otherness reveal the possibility of God? Interfaith dialogue in our postmodern fragmented and pluralist world lays bare the question of how the whole project of religious discourse and practice (in all faith traditions) are to be pursued in an all pervasive "context of otherness." There have been many attempts to rethink a theology of interfaith dialogue in a world of manifest ambiguities and ever new complexities. The history of religions seems to defy and resist all attempts of reduction to a common denominator. Our modern and postmodern situation is a "constellation" or a "force-field" in the word of Martin Jay. According to Jay, "a constellation is a juxtaposition rather than an integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principles."<sup>16</sup> Richard Bernstein takes the matter further,

There are always unexpected contingent ruptures and radical instabilities that disrupt and break the project of reconciliation. The changing elements of the new constellation resist such reduction. What is 'new' about this constellation is the growing awareness of the depth of radical instabilities. We have to learn to think and act in the 'in between' interstices of forced reconciliations and radical dispersion.<sup>17</sup>

In this 'constellation' or 'field-force' environment, a theology of dialogue raises crucial questions about subjectivity, otherness, and 'relationality.' The challenge to most people

<sup>16</sup> Martin Jay, *Adorno*. (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1984), 14 - 15.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation: Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 66.

engaged in interfaith dialogue is how to remain faithfully rooted in their own religious tradition and yet become open to and respectful of those committed to very different and sometimes incompatible beliefs and values. It seems that the harmony of a wider and multi-faith world can only be promoted by maintaining the integrity of each partner in relationship.

Michael Barnes describes interfaith dialogue as “the negotiation of the middle.”<sup>18</sup> But he adds “I do not mean by this some sort of haggling or bargaining over positions of power but, more profoundly, a mediation of the context of otherness.”<sup>19</sup> Even more correctly, Barnes understands that this ‘middle’ is always broken and always mended.<sup>20</sup> The negotiation of the middle “is to recognize that all Christians [as well as all faith traditions] speak out of a dimension of irreducible otherness which they encounter at the very heart of their own identity, the ‘middle’ of a world shared with other.”<sup>21</sup> This study would agree with Barnes that interfaith dialogue has to negotiate the ‘middle’ but also seeks to “give a theological account of practices of welcome and hospitality towards the other.”<sup>22</sup> Even better, according to Rowan Williams, interfaith dialogue is a theology of “learning about learning.”<sup>23</sup> Williams sees a dire need to let the other, the religious other, teach us something alien and even disturbing about our theological framework.

For all practical purposes, different faith traditions need to learn to communicate in constructive ways with those with whom they most differ theologically and doctrinally. In terms of religious dialogue, our theological imagination (in all faith traditions) has to clothe

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<sup>18</sup> Barnes, *Theology and Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21.

<sup>19</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 22.

<sup>20</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 54.

<sup>21</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 132.

itself in what Timothy. J. Winter terms, a “transcendently-ordained tolerance,”<sup>24</sup> or Khaled Abou el-Fadl aptly calls the “imperative of collective enterprise of goodness.”<sup>25</sup> This kind of hospitality and tolerance is not a superficial sentimental longing for peaceful coexistence with the religious other or with those we differ with theologically, but a hospitality and a tolerance which are “deeply rooted in a mutual recognition of, and respect for the holiness that lies at the core of different faith and wisdom traditions, and all revealed religions.”<sup>26</sup> This study proposes a mystical perspective on religious dialogue. This is not a recipe for mutual agreement over tea and nice conversation or a Christian-centered salvation problematic. Karl Rahner points to our most sinister temptation when he cautions, “How are we to ensure that the absolute optimism of Christianity does not become the naive optimism which turns all human religiosity into some generalized revelation of the divine?”<sup>27</sup> Aware of the dangers of shallow conversations, the mystical perspective on dialogue seeks to preserve the freedom and integrity of each party, be it within or without a particular religious tradition. This perspective scrutinizes what happens to the identity of a Christian theologians and/or mystics when they encounter the other by crossing the threshold into another world. This insight also gives an account of the vulnerability of the self in the face of the religious other, and touches upon the whole epistemological question of how mystics convey what happens in the imagination in a way that is pre-conception, before the terrain of logical and conceptual expression of the mystical experience. Also,

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<sup>24</sup> Timothy Winter, “Islam and the Threat of Europe,” *World Faiths Encounter*, 29 (2001): 7.

<sup>25</sup> Khaled Abou el-Fadl *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*. ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 93.

<sup>26</sup> *The Religious Other*, ed. Muhammad Suheyl Umar (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2008), iv.

<sup>27</sup> Rahner, “Thoughts on the Possibility of Belief Today,” in *Theological Investigations* 5 (1966): 3 - 22. In this article, Rahner uses the controversial term ‘Anonymous Christians’ for the first time, and he asks “what reason should I have for not being a Christian, if Christianity means taking possession of the mystery of man with absolute optimism?” See an excellent defense of Rahner’s idea by Gavin D’Costa “Karl Rahner’s Anonymous Christian – A Reappraisal.” *Modern Theology* 1/2 (1985): 131 – 48.



how does one name of evoke this mystical apprehension which evolves sequentially as vulnerability, openness and finally conviction?

The crucial question of otherness is important to this research. It suffices to say at this point that an honest historical consciousness would suggest that false essentialisms, with a dangerous rhetoric of either/or and simplistic answers to complex historical and religious situations are the common sources of the fear and negation of the other. But, as Richard Bernstein puts it, “the basic condition for all understanding requires one to test and risk one’s convictions and prejudgments in and through an encounter with what is radically ‘other’ and alien.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, de Beaurecueil’s scholarship on Anṣārī’s thought and life among Afghans was a genuine encounter with “what is radically other and alien” on the most difficult ground, religious beliefs, and traditions.

This research demonstrates that de Beaurecueil’s life journey was an attempt to craft a theology of religions that “imagines the possibility of harmonious difference and peace as the inner dynamic of the triune God,”<sup>29</sup> to borrow Gerard Loughlin’s beautiful line. In order to live up to Loughlin’s demand of “the possibility of harmonious difference and peace,” the Dominican friar had to be willing to struggle theologically, philosophically and politically with the ambiguity and complexity of both the interior and exterior religious other. On the one hand, the interior religious other cuts against the grain of monolithic reading and interpretation of scriptures and tradition, and views theological and philosophical dissent as a necessary component of search for truth within a particular faith tradition. De Beaurecueil was in the eyes of many an interior other to the traditional

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<sup>28</sup> Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Gerard Loughlin, *Telling God’s Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21. Loughlin is commenting on Millbank’s use of Augustine’s musical metaphors to explain the singularity of Christian community. However, the question to how such a harmony may be achieved is left open. See Millbank, “Postmodern Critical Augustinianism,” *Modern Theology*, 7.3;(1991): 223 - 37.

Catholic religious life. His life dissented from a regular religious life and pushed the boundaries to the breaking point. He thumbed his nose at his Dominican brothers. (*Un pied de nez de Beurecueil à ses frères Dominicains*). Many criticized him for being too avant-garde and doing his own thing.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, exterior religious others claim a different and even an incompatible path of salvation. They question the very core of the faith tradition. De Beurecueil, as an other within his own tradition, learned to recognize and appreciate otherness and difference without, and developed a nuanced and complex understanding of difference in general, a sensitivity and an openness to the exterior religious other. Therefore, he had to move from a mere philosophical and theological perception to a deep mystical imagination of the other. This mystical imagination tried to avoid dogmatic, fanatical, and irrational views. De Beurecueil's life was an attempt to see those who are other than, or different from him religiously, as the 'face of Jesus of Nazareth.'

Being estranged and other to one's own religious tradition is already a sign that de Beurecueil is willing to take seriously disagreement, difference, diversity of opinions and even dissent within. This disposition is in itself a praxis of dialogue. Even more demanding than dialogue within, the praxis of interfaith dialogue demands respect, concern and hospitality toward an exterior other.<sup>31</sup> As David Tracy puts it, "The praxis of interreligious dialogue itself, ... does not merely bear a 'religious dimension.' It is a religious experience."<sup>32</sup> It seems that the horizon of the context of otherness exists in all faith communities. However, the danger of a superficial and an artificial encounter with the

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<sup>30</sup> The author's correspondence with Jacques Jomier, Maurice Borrmans and conversations with a number of Dominicans show their discontent with de Beurecueil's choice to stay away from the IDEO and abandon scholarship for pastoral work.

<sup>31</sup> Raymond Pannikar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1991), 98.

religious other hangs over any attempt to reach out. Are faith traditions willing to risk their religious convictions through an encounter with the other, the religious other; and face that which is (or might be) radically alien to their tradition? Fortunately, encountering the other is often not only a fertile ground for our imagination and hermeneutical sensitivity but also an opportunity to expand our theological imagination and curtail our indifference and ignorance. The goal of a mystical imagination is to envision and foster a new ethical and religious horizon of “understanding the other in his or her strongest light,” to borrow Bernstein’s phrase.<sup>33</sup> Therefore a mystical perspective on religious dialogue is a “theology which takes seriously the Christian [or other faith tradition] responsibility of hospitality to the stranger, the responsibility of narrating a story which neither totalises nor relativises [the other].”<sup>34</sup>

The example of de Beaurecueil offers an embryonic methodology and a theology of dialogue that could serve contemporary Catholic Christians in relationship with the religious other especially at this time and age when the hopes and enthusiasm of Vatican II concerning dialogue with Islam seem to run out of steam. The mystical perspective of religious dialogue allows Christians to remain faithfully rooted in their Christian vision of a time-honored truth and permits others whose truth-claims are different and maybe incompatible their beliefs. Neither side should need to conceptually dilute or minimize to their beliefs when faced with differences. De Beaurecueil, for example, lived his religious life as a Dominican friar in an alien land, and it is remarkable to note that he found hospitality and a home among the Afghans who were in so many ways alien to him culturally and religiously. Hence, this research relies primarily on de Beaurecueil’s reading, interpretation and translation of Anṣārī’s work and life. Particularly, when it comes to

<sup>33</sup> Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 28.

Anṣārī's works in Persian, de Beaurecueil is our primary but not exclusive source.<sup>35</sup> The best and most accurate biography of the master in any European language is undeniably de Beaurecueil's.<sup>36</sup> After seventeen years of academic inquiry in Cairo on Anṣārī's thought and life, (editing ancient manuscripts, mastering Persian and Arabic, writing academic papers on Islamic mysticism), de Beaurecueil became the foremost and uncontested specialist of Anṣārī in the West. After Cairo, he spent twenty years in Kabul where his *praxis mystica* or *la mystique du terrain* took form.

For most of his adult life, de Beaurecueil lived his Christian discipleship and his vocation as a Dominican friar in a direct relationship with Islam, and in predominantly Muslim lands. However, from 1946 until his death in 2005, Islam as a religion, a civilization and a polity, and particularly, the mystical dimensions of Islam came to inform and shape his Dominican life. At the end, his theological, philosophical, epistemological and above all mystical imagination were the fruit of the encounter of Islam and Christianity on the one hand, and of Western European and Arabic and Persian world-views on the other. Within the larger context of Roman Catholic interfaith tradition, and particularly in regard to Islam, the Dominican Order's contribution took a decisive turn with the foundation of the IDEO.<sup>37</sup> De Beaurecueil belongs to a long tradition of Dominican friars who have pursued steady and serious study (*une recherche pointue et érudite*) of Islamic civilization. This history has been a long and torturous road and has often yielded an image of Islam which is at the best ambivalent, if not outrightly negative.

De Beaurecueil's life testifies to the issues at the heart in Christian-Muslim dialogue, not only *le lourd passif historique* or 'the making of an image' as Norman Daniel

<sup>35</sup> The author does not read Persian.

<sup>36</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī (396 - 481 H. / 1006 - 1089), Mystique ḥanbalīte* (Beyrouth, Imprimerie Catholique, 1965).

<sup>37</sup> See chapter 1 for the history of the IDEO.

puts it,<sup>38</sup> but radical theological incompatibilities between Islam and Christianity. How could Christians reconcile the event of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of faith, with the event of Islam six centuries later? In addition, are Muslims saved in spite of Islam or saved through it? In the words of Anawati «*comment faire place à l'Islam dans une vision Chrétienne de l'histoire du salut?*»<sup>39</sup> How did de Beaurecueil answer those fundamental challenges? His scholarship deals with the question of the place of Islam in God's providence (*Le mystère de l'Islam dans la providence divine*), and takes seriously Marie Dominique Chenu's prophetic intuition: *l'Islam comme vocation* (the study of Islam as a vocation). Chenu's view was not unlike Benjamin Disraeli's idea of "the east is a career"<sup>40</sup> but in the Dominican's case without imperial and colonial ambitions. To the question, *pourquoi l'Islam dans le plan providentiel?* Louis Massignon (d. 1962) takes the matter to a more difficult and delicate point, «*Est ce à moi de vous rappeler le 'mystère' de l'Islam et les redoutables questions qu'il pose à la conscience Chrétienne quand on essaie de 'sonder les desseins de Dieu' à son égard?*»<sup>41</sup> It seems that l'Abbé Jules Monchanin sails in the right direction when he writes:

*Quand nous aurions converti tous les vivants du monde entier pour en faire des Chrétiens. Objet: à notre image (si déficiente) il reste tous les morts de l'Inde pour moi, de l'Islam pour vous; et tant que nous n'aurons pas compris cette toute puissante intercession pour tous les morts qui seule permet de faire converger les différents milieux religieux humains depuis leur origine jusqu'au Juge du Jugement, le Christ aux mains percées par sa justice, nous n'aurons pas rempli la vocation que Dieu a gravée dans nos cœurs, vocation universelle.*<sup>42</sup>

This study keeps track of de Beaurecueil's unique contribution to interfaith dialogue. His is a genuine encounter with the religious other. It is a venture of a guest who

<sup>38</sup> Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (London: Oneworld, 2009). (reprint)

<sup>39</sup> Jean Jacques Pérennès, *Georges Anawati (1905 - 1994)*, (Paris: Cerf, 2009), 64.

<sup>40</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Point, 1979), 5.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Massignon, «Abbé Jules Monchanin (m. 1957)» in *Opera minora*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar al Maaref, 1963), 770.

welcomes his hosts. As Derrida puts it, «*L'hôte comme host est un guest.*»<sup>43</sup> According to Claude Geffré, we must think about religious diversity as the theological paradigm of our time.<sup>44</sup> In our case, it is to understand Muslims and Islamic civilization from within (*comprendre l'islam de l'intérieur*) and to experience its holy hospitality (*hospitalité sacrée*). It seems that such a task demands what Jules Monchanin terms «*une patience géologique*» or «*La patience intellectuelle dans l'impatience de l'amour,*» in Chenu's words. It is the kind of patience that Rainer Maria Rilke refers to in his *Letters to a Young Poet*:

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will find them gradually, without noticing it, and live along some distant day into the answer.<sup>45</sup>

De Beaurecueil's life and work point to «*le mystère de l'Islam, c'est le mystère même de Dieu, celle de la providence divine.*»<sup>46</sup> As Pérennès recalls de Beaurecueil's remark,

*On doit s'en tenir à des images poétiques: tous les chemins montent au sommet, tous les fleuves vont à la mer. Un certain silence devant le mystère de l'Islam est probablement inévitable pour un Chrétien, car, au fond, c'est le mystère même de Dieu, qui lui échappe.*<sup>47</sup>

Hence, no one has the final say on the divine providence according to which men and women follow different faith traditions with sincerity and authenticity, and believe therein different paths of salvation. Mahmoud Ayoub reminds us that:

... the Qur'ān categorically condemns the arrogant boasting by any of the followers of all three monotheistic religions of the superiority of their faith over that of the two other communities. It states, "It is not in accordance with your [Muslims]

<sup>43</sup> Derrida, *A Dieu*, 79. (emphasis added by Derrida himself)

<sup>44</sup> Claude Geffré, «Le pluralisme religieux comme un paradigme théologique,» *Croire et interpréter, le tournant herméneutique de la théologie* (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 90 - 109.

<sup>45</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letter to a Young Poet* (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), 25.

<sup>46</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 351.

<sup>47</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 351.

wishes, nor the wishes of the people of the Book; rather whoever does evil , s/he will be recompensed for it, nor will s/he find any friend or helper against God. And anyone who performs righteous deeds—male and female—and is a person of faith, those will enter the garden [of paradise] and they will not be wronged in the least. (Q.4:123-24).” Thus we see that the criterion for acceptance with God is neither religious identity nor class or gender but faith and good deeds.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, de Beaurecueil’s biography dramatizes the intractable difficulties and hopes of two faith traditions struggling to see each other as genuine and authentic. There is no place for romanticism and/or bigotry in this encounter. There are obstinate and incompatible faith claims that need to be reckoned with at the most fundamental levels. But one of the goals of theology is a persistent attempt to square circles and to genuinely account for the limit of human endeavor in understanding fully “God’s self-communication to humanity,” to borrow from Karl Rahner. This dissertation is also the author’s own journey to tease out the theological acumen of otherness, particularly, the religious other and what it really means to be a theologian on the edge, constantly defining oneself *vis-à-vis* the larger community. In addition, the personality and unique character of Anṣārī and de Beaurecueil have deeply influenced my theological imagination. They were two deeply religious men endowed with special qualities. This dissertation is a spiritual journey toward the heart of a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī through the life journey of an exceptional Dominican friar. The mystical dimensions of both faith traditions provide a plausible road map to hospitality.

The mystical traditions of both Islam and Christianity are complex and beyond the scope of our investigation. This study focuses on aspects of Christian and Islamic mysticism directly relevant to Anṣārī’s and de Beaurecueil’s milieus. Both mystics lived an ordinary life with its ups and downs and their lives witness to what it means to take seriously one’s own faith tradition. Our interest lies in the mystical tradition of the 11<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Mahmoud Ayoub, *A Muslim’s View of Christianity* (MaryKnoll: Orbis Books, 2007), 3.

century Khurāsān and particularly, the spirituality of a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī. The mystical legacies of Anṣārī and de Beaurecueil reject ambitious mystics, seem critical of institutional religions and deliberately scorn centers of power. In this case, Margaret Smith's conception of mysticism is arguable but nonetheless useful for our purpose. She writes, "Mysticism [has] its rise in a revolt of the soul, in those who [are] really spiritually minded, against formality in religion and also indifference to religion."<sup>49</sup> De Beaurecueil agrees that all human language about God, in terms of doctrines, dogmas, creeds, is by definition inadequate. As T.S. Eliot puts it "shabby equipment always deteriorating."<sup>50</sup> Eliot was concerned with the limitation and inadequacy of the poetic language, but mystics were and are concerned with the inadequacy of all human language and images about God. Eliot wrote:

Trying to use words, and every attempt  
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure . . . .  
. . . . And so each venture  
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate <sup>51</sup>

The mystical dimensions of Islam and Christianity are treated in their integrity, differences and incompatibilities. The encounter of both mystical traditions in the work and life of de Beaurecueil undergird this research. Finally, in terms of mystical and intellectual lineages within the field of Islamic studies, de Beaurecueil is closer to the path of the seminal and revolutionary spiritual heritage of Massignon, and to the ministry of hospitality and presence among Muslims of Charles de Foucauld and Pierre Claverie (d. 1996), rather than to the traditionalist or perennialist school of René Guénon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Frithjof Schuon, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and the like. To be certain, both lineages have played an influential role in redefining the nature of religions and the meaning of religious

<sup>49</sup> Margaret Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam* (Westport, CT: Pir Publications, 1994), 1.

<sup>50</sup> T.S. Eliot "East Coker" in *The Four Quartets* (London: Mariner Books, 1968), 16.

<sup>51</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*, 16.



diversity. These two intellectual lineages are complementary in their contribution to a wider and deeper understanding of the philosophical, mystical and spiritual dimensions of Islam.<sup>52</sup>

## ***II Methodology and Chapters Outline***

Even though, this study is not primarily concerned with comparative religions, the insight of comparative mystical theologies of Islam and Christianity will be used whenever necessary. In addition, a historical approach helps account for the life, spiritual milieu and the intellectual biographies of Anṣārī and de Beaurecueil. What major events shaped their mystical paths? Who fostered and nurtured their mystical quest and yearning? It is crucial to uncover, on the one hand, the disparities between Anṣārī's and de Beaurecueil's human journeys and, on the other, the similarities of their spiritual quest. The differences between them in terms of geography and history are important to understanding their spiritual paths. This study will open a window into how de Beaurecueil read and treated Anṣārī's work as a path of conversion and a sign of the reign of God.

The first two chapters of this dissertation are biographical in nature. Chapter I, entitled "A Life Curve of a Mystic and a Prophet of Dialogue," establishes de Beaurecueil's biography on the basis of published and archival material of the Dominican Order kept in Cairo at the IDEO, in Paris at St. Jacques's Priory, in Rome at the Angelicum, and in Kabul at Lycée Esteghlāl. One will follow de Beaurecueil's life curve, studies, and his first involvement with Islam, and focus on his life as a Dominican friar at Le Saulchoir and at the IDEO, and his relationship with IFAO in Cairo. In addition, the chapter focuses on the foundation of the IDEO in Cairo.

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<sup>52</sup> For a study of these two lineages see: Patrick Laude, *Pathways to an Inner Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

Chapter II delves into Anṣārī's life and historical milieu. His life story and unique personality are, in our view, the key reasons which compelled de Beaurecueil to dedicate a life time of study to the Pīr-of Herāt and later to take up residence in Kabul from 1963 to 1983. The second chapter locates, on the one hand, the Pīr of Herāt within the Khurāsānian Ṣūfī masters, examines his Ḥanbalī spirituality, and on the other, pays attention to the political and theological upheavals of 11<sup>th</sup> century Khurāsān. Who was the Pīr of Herāt, who were his influential teachers? This biography touches upon his belligerent temper, outright hatred of speculative theology and trials. Anṣārī's biography is an important building stone in understanding de Beaurecueil's attraction to the Pīr of Herāt, and a necessary tool to interpret de Beaurecueil's mystical vision.

Chapter III and IV examines de Beaurecueil's intellectual and spiritual path and borrows the language of the classical mystical journey of *via illuminativa* and *unitiva* to describe the friar's ortho-praxis. In most Christian traditions, the mystical path follows a three step scheme: *via purgativa*, *via illuminativa* and *via unitiva*. *Via purgativa* (katharsis) or "the dark night of the soul" to speak like John of the Cross is the first stage, the stage of breakdown and soul searching; followed by the *via illuminativa*, the intellectual phase, a search to know and grasp the spiritual path; this final stage leads to union with God, the ultimate goal of a spiritual life, *via unitiva*. In the Thomistic tradition, the *via unitiva* is comparable to the beatific vision, or for John of the Cross and Teresa of Avilla, it is the consummation or the union between the beloved and the lover, the last castle of one's spiritual journey and quest for God.

Chapter III *via illuminativa* serves as a springboard for the next chapter. It explores de Beaurecueil's annotations, translations and commentaries on the most important and widely circulated spiritual treatises attributed to the Pīr of Herāt. Three treatises regarding

the stages of the spiritual path are under consideration: *ʿIlal al-maqāmāt* (The Flaws in the Stages), *Kitāb ṣad maydān* (The Hundred Fields) and *Kitāb manāzil al-sāʿirīn* (The Stages of the Wayfarers). Anṣārī's most popular and beloved collection of intimate conversations with God, the *Munājāt* concludes the chapter<sup>53</sup>. On the one hand, de Beaurecueil's erudite scholarship sheds light on the spiritual insights of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī master; and on the other, these spiritual treatises inspired de Beaurecueil's Dominican life and mystical quest in the midst of a Muslim community.

De Beaurecueil's life among Muslims in Afghanistan and the establishment of the *Maison d'Abraham* for Kabul street children constitute the *via unitiva* of his spiritual journey. Chapter IV focuses on the Dominican friar's *praxis mystica* or *mystique du terrain*. Our argument is that by providing hospitality to a group of Kabul's street children who find themselves alien and estranged in their own land, de Beaurecueil experienced what Massignon called "the holy hospitality of Islam." It was in giving hospitality to his host that the guest experienced true hospitality. Again as Massignon puts it correctly, «*Pour comprendre l'autre, il ne faut pas l'annexer, mais devenir son hôte.*»<sup>54</sup> In *Nous avons partagé le sel et le pain*, de Beaurecueil recounts the act of thanksgiving (Eucharist) in the midst of a dire social milieu.<sup>55</sup> Our contention is that the Dominican friar experienced through simple human gestures (breaking bread and sharing salt) the infinite horizon of Afghan people's hospitality and a 'taste' of mystical enlightenment. His books —*Un Chrétien en Afghanistan*, *Mes Enfants de Kaboul* and *Je crois à l'étoile du matin*— are the foundation of our argument.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *Munājāt: Cris du coeur*, trans de Beaurecueil (Paris: Sindbad, 1988).

<sup>54</sup> Louis Massignon's advice to the Dominican friars in Cairo, quoted in Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Nous avons partagé le sel et le pain* (Paris: Cerf, 1965).

<sup>56</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien en Afghanistan* (Paris: Cerf, 2001); *Mes Enfants de Kaboul* (Paris: Cerf, 2004); and *Je crois à l'étoile du matin* (Paris: Cerf, 2005).

The last chapter focuses on a crucial point at the heart of the theoretical framework of this dissertation, the difference and the otherness of the religious other. Otherness, being other to the other, doing theology from a position of weakness or liminality are crucial to the author's own intellectual and spiritual journeys. De Beaurecueil's life present a unique opportunity to probe these concepts. This chapter adopts a philosophical approach to the question of otherness and builds upon three major French philosophers: Emmanuel Lévinas (d. 1995), Jacques Derrida (d. 2004) and Paul Ricoeur (d. 2005)

## ***Chapter I Serge de Beaurecueil, O.P. (1917 - 2005)***

*... non pas, certes, partir à la conquête de l'islam, ni même convertir ici et là quelques individus séparés par là-même de la Communauté musulmane, mais se livrer à l'étude approfondie de l'islam, de sa doctrine, de sa civilisation. Apostolat à longue échéance et de qualité institutionnelle.<sup>57</sup>*

*J'ai rencontré Quelqu'un, le Dieu vivant, qui m'a 'séduit', pour parler comme Jérémie. Je ne crois guère aux idéologies, mais je crois à Jésus de Nazareth. Je ne crois guère à la morale, mais je crois à l'Esprit saint, guidant mes pas, de l'intérieur. Je ne crois pas 'posséder' la Vérité que je pourrai, du haut de ma supériorité, dispenser aux autres. Je souhaite seulement, avec eux, souvent par eux et à travers eux, pas à pas, jour après jour, aller vers elle, afin que ce soit elle qui me possède. Quelle que puisse être par moments l'obscurité de notre nuit, je crois, pour eux et pour moi, de tout mon être, à la radieuse Étoile du matin.<sup>58</sup>*

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<sup>57</sup> Régis Morelon «L'IDEO est ses institutions fondatrices sur la relation à l'Islam.» *MD* 15 (2001):137 - 216; and «In Memoriam: le Père M. D. Chenu,» *MIDEO* 20 (1991): 521 - 527; (Texte de Marie Dominique Chenu au conseil provincial de la province de France, Octobre 1945.) Also, «Le Père Georges Anawati, o.p.» *Arab Press Center*, (1996): 19 - 40.

<sup>58</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 24.

One of the jewels of Cairo, the city of thousand minarets, is “Islamic Cairo” in the neighborhood of ‘Abbāsiyya. In this part of the city, visitors marvel at Cairo’s Islamic heritage, which is a world of famous gates, medieval forts, shrines, hundred years old markets. Above all, the vicinity is filled with Fatimide, Mamluk and Ottoman mosques and mausoleums with breathtaking architecture. Another point of reference is the quarter of Gamaliyya where Naguib Mahfouz (d. 2006) locates his major novels. His Nobel Prize winning novel, *Midaq Alley* (*zuqāq al-midaq*), is set in an alley in Khān al-Khalīlī (a major bazaar) in Islamic Cairo.

Likewise in ‘Abbāsiyya, the Dominican friar, Antonin Jaussen (d. 1962), built an impressive Dominican priory<sup>59</sup> at 1st Maṣnā‘ al-Ṭarābīsh Road, about a mile away from al-Azhar’s Mosque and University. The precious stone of the priory is the library of the IDEO, named after one of the founding members of the institution, Georges G. Anawati (d. 1994). It is within the walls of this priory and its library that brother Serge de Laugier de Beaurecueil would start a unique journey that would lead him to Afghanistan in the footsteps of Anṣārī. Correctly, Dominique Avon remarks, «*Dans le grand champ des études mystiques, Serge de Beaurecueil trace un sillon d’une forte originalité.*»<sup>60</sup>

This chapter examines the early life and formative years of de Beaurecueil. This biography pays limited attention to the details of de Beaurecueil’s family background but focuses more on the socio-political, institutional, and theological backgrounds that

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<sup>59</sup> See Table 3 (A group of friars at the priory).

<sup>60</sup> Dominique Avon, *Les frères Prêcheurs en Orient* (Paris: Cerf, 205), 722.

influenced his Dominican life. French Dominican orientalism has to be understood in the larger context of French Catholic orientalism. Furthermore, the modernist crisis in the larger Catholic Church, and the environment of *ressourcement*<sup>61</sup> and the movement of *la nouvelle théologie*<sup>62</sup> in Catholic France would contribute to the Second Vatican Council 1962 - 65. With regard to de Beaurecueil's life, the decisive turn in terms of a scientific investigation of Islam and its civilization among French Dominicans stems from the Studium of Kain-lez-Tournai known as Le Saulchoir de Kain in Belgium. It would lead to the foundation of the IDEO in Cairo in 1953.<sup>63</sup> Among de Beaurecueil's mentors and teachers in the Order, there were Marie Dominique Chenu, Albert Avril (d. 1978), and the regent of studies, Thomas Philipe (d. 1993). This chapter does not neglect Chenu's crucial influence on both the foundation of the IDEO and de Beaurecueil. Thus, de Beaurecueil's life as a Dominican friar at Le Saulchoir, his stay at IDEO in Cairo, and his relationship

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<sup>61</sup> *Ressourcement* theology was a theological movement from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the Second Vatican Council. This endeavor sought to revitalize both the theology and the pastoral life of the church. The goal was to recover and re-appropriate the sources of Catholic liturgy, biblical study, historical theology (early church fathers) and the writings of other saints and doctors in whom the Catholic tradition finds its most powerful expression, particularly St. Thomas Aquinas. (For an extensive treatment of the issue see Marcellino D'Ambrosio's doctoral dissertation "Henri de Lubac and the Recovery of the Traditional Hermeneutics," directed by the Jesuit Avery Dulles and submitted to the Catholic University of America in 1991.

<sup>62</sup> What is *la nouvelle théologie*? During the tumultuous period of 1930 - 1950, a broad intellectual and spiritual movement arose within the European Catholic community in response to what was called the modernist crisis. In Catholic circles, the reigning neo-Scholasticism seemed sorely ill-equipped to meet the challenge. Though this movement drew some of its inspiration from earlier theologians and philosophers such as Möhler, Newman, Gardeil, Rousselot, Gilson, and Blondel; it also owed a great deal to the French poets Charles Péguy and Paul Claudel. Theologians involved in this movement included Italian, Belgian and German thinkers such as Emile Mersch, Dom Odo Casel, Romano Guardini, Karl Adam, Hans Urs von Balthasar (from Switzerland) and Karl Rahner. However, it was France that was the undisputed center of theological activity during this fertile period. Principally led by the Jesuits of Lyons's province and the Dominicans of Le Saulchoir, the French theological revival of these years produced some of the greatest names in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Catholic scholarship: Henri de Lubac, Jean Danielou, Yves Congar, Marie-Dominique Chenu and Louis Bouyer. It is this important theological movement that was called by its opponents "*la nouvelle théologie*." The following books are excellent resources to understand both *ressourcement* and *la nouvelle théologie*. Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie*; (London: T. and T. Clark International, 2010), Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology. A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), M. D'Ambrosio, "Ressourcement Theology," *Communio*, 18; Ulrich. Engel, "The question of modernity," trans. B. Hicks, o.p. (Berlin: Collection Chenu, 2003), 1 - 9.

<sup>63</sup> The IDEO was officially established on March 7, 1953 and the *MIDEO* (*Mélanges de l'IDEO*) was first published in 1954. Informally, the IDEO started in 1944 - 45 but since 1938, Chenu and Cardinal E. Tisserant had written the charter of the institution. See Morelon, "L'IDEO du Caire" *MD*, 15 (2001): 52 - 27.

with IFAO (in Cairo) will be scrutinized. Hence, the first section focuses on Early Childhood and Religious Life; the second one deals with the establishment of the IDEO, and finally the third section is entitled, Answering Chenu's Call.

## *I 'Chienne d'enfance'*<sup>64</sup>

### **1 Paris**

On August 28, 1917, Serge Emmanuel Marie de Laugier de Beaurecueil was born into an aristocratic family in his maternal grandfather's house. His birth place was the luxurious district of Paris (16<sup>e</sup> arrondissement) at 42, rue Copernic, the present location of the Lebanese Embassy. His father was le Comte Pierre de Laugier de Beaurecueil, a thirty three year old cavalry officer, away in the trenches of WWI at the time of his birth. His mother, Roberte de Quelen, came from a family of wealthy *Drogomans* (interpreters) of the Ottoman Empire, who had settled in Istanbul.<sup>65</sup> De Beaurecueil gives a quick look at his genealogy:

*Mes antécédents forment un cocktail génétique assez étonnant, alliant le provençal au breton, le corse au polonais, tout cela de bonne souche et bien titré, avec une bonne giclée de sang juif, ma grand mère maternelle étant une Oppenheim.*<sup>66</sup>

Unfortunately, this fortunate and noble heritage did not guarantee a happy childhood. His parents married in 1914 and divorced in 1930. Pérennès remarks:

*Fortuné, certes, mais pas heureux: c'était un couple qui ne marchait pas pour diverses raisons: leur mariage était arrangé, comme cela se faisait encore à cette époque dans certains milieux; mais surtout, la maman, une très belle femme, était très capricieuse, elle-même blessée par une enfance difficile.*<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Terrible expression, but I borrow it from de Beaurecueil himself. See *Mes enfants de Kaboul* (Paris: Lates, 1983), 113.

<sup>65</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 12.

<sup>66</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 13.

<sup>67</sup> Pérennès, «Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009», 1.



Hence, de Beaurecueil spent most of his childhood and youth with the stigma of a child born into a privileged yet broken family. In Catholic aristocratic circles, divorce or birth out of wedlock was an anathema. In both cases, the child paid a tremendous price even though he or she was completely innocent. In de Beaurecueil's case, he could not enjoy a regular childhood where he would invite his peers to his house or visit them in theirs. De

Beaurecueil remarks:

*Les enfants sont en pension (pour s'en débarrasser) mais cela vaut mieux que d'être tiraillés comme nous l'étions chez nos parents. Mais être en pension en raison du divorce de nos parents n'était pas très drôle à cette époque, c'était comme avoir du sida aujourd'hui, c'était honteux et nous étions des gens à ne pas fréquenter, jamais on n'était invité par un camarade, on ne pouvait inviter personne à la maison. On était mis au banc de la société.<sup>68</sup>*

Hence, de Beaurecueil's early life was marked by the divorce of his parents. Later in life, he recalls,

*Dans un foyer désuni comme le nôtre, il fallait bien que les enfants débarrassent le plancher. J'ai suivi mon destin: c'était la chienne de vie des enfants de divorcés qui commençait, dont certains souvenirs, à soixante-quinze ans, me brûlent encore comme des cautères.<sup>69</sup>*

De Beaurecueil and his siblings were pariahs in their community. Later his sister, Tania, born in 1920, became a nun in the Benedictine Order in the Drôme, and his brother Raoul, born in 1922, became a social worker. The grim fortune condition of his early years would have a lasting impact on Serge. His childhood was torn apart by family feuds and it devastated his view of marriage and family life. Luckily, the situation would spark in him a remarkable tenderness and care for children and youngsters which he exhibited later in life.

He turned this traumatic childhood experience around. He had the grace to see that hurt

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<sup>68</sup> De Beaurecueil, «La vie comme aventure» <http://www.Pingouins.com/Témoignages/Afghanistan/Afghanistan.html> (access, September 23, 2010); also, Jean Marie Mérigoux, «Un mystique dominicain» *Sources*, Nov.-Dec. 2005, 286; and «Biographie de Serge de Beaurecueil, op.» [www.IDEO.org](http://www.IDEO.org) under the title «Les membres fondateurs de l'IDEO.»

<sup>69</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 13.

does not need to produce hurt. Pérennès agrees, «*Né de parents séparés, il a toujours aimé les enfants, cherchant peut-être à donner la tendresse qu'il n'a pas reçue lui-même.*»<sup>70</sup> Two words summarize his early childhood: fear and dream. He dreaded loneliness, the echo of nocturnal birds, and the emptiness of the dark hallways of his maternal grandfather's house in which he spent his childhood. At the age of ten, his grandfather sent him to the boarding school of Saint-Croix de Neuilly.<sup>71</sup> He recalled a lonely childhood and his constant attempt to dream himself away from his social environment.

During this ordeal, he found solace in the world of his books. He dreamt and hoped for a journey that would take him as far as possible from France, from all that his childhood meant. He writes, «*Tout! Pour m'échapper et m'accomplir.*»<sup>72</sup> In one of his childhood dreams he saw himself as the son of an Indian Rajah in exile and hoping to return one day.<sup>73</sup> He said to himself, "I had to dream to keep my mind away from family matters and school."<sup>74</sup> This childhood dream born out of cultural and religious stigma would find an echo in his religious life later on. Maybe these traumatic events explain why de Beaurecueil speaks very little about his early childhood. There seems to be a reluctant to open the pages of his early childhood and family stories. Now and then, he would volunteer a few facts about his parents, a grandfather and an uncle, and remarkably very little about his mother. His unfortunate childhood experience sowed the seeds for a deep yearning, a search for otherness. It is probable that this earlier experience of 'liminality' facilitated his encounter with the religious other and later his mystical conversation with Anṣārī in his mature years.

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<sup>70</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 129.

<sup>71</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 13.

<sup>72</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 14.

<sup>73</sup> In 1955, on his way to Kabul, he arrived in India, his childhood dream. He could not help but see in this childlike dream a sign of God's hand leading and guiding him to his promised land, Afghanistan.

<sup>74</sup> De Beaurecueil, «La vie comme aventure, » 1.

His entire epistemology and hermeneutic of the religious other took root at Le Saulchoir, continued in Cairo, and blossomed in Kabul.

To return to his early life, under the care of his grandfather his early schooling and secondary education took place at the most prestigious and elite schools in Paris. «*Il a fait ses études dans les bonnes maisons,*» remarks Pérennès.<sup>75</sup> After Saint Croix de Neuilly, he went to l'École de Gerson, and then to Lycée de Janson de Sailly where he earned his *Baccalauréat*. Maybe the only laudable parts of his childhood were they prestigious schools he attended. At the age of fourteen, de Beaurecueil enrolled in Arabic classes at Lycée de Janson de Sailly in addition to his classical Russian courses. His fascination for foreign places and the desire to escape his world explain those moves. He passed his baccalaureate in philosophy with Arabic as a third language.<sup>76</sup> The dream of a future in a distant land and the desire to stay as far as possible from family life and aristocratic Paris opened a window for religious life. Religious life meant a flight from the mundane world to consecrate oneself to God's work. He recalled his desire to join a religious community at a very early age:

*J'ai rêvé l'avenir comme quelque chose de plus éloigné possible de ce que je voyais autour moi d'où le désir de la vie religieuse, je me disais, je ne marierai pas c'est la catastrophe! Et j'irai le plus loin possible. Dans ma logique d'enfant je compris que si le Christ avait donné sa vie pour moi eh! bien moi je donnerai ma vie pour lui.*<sup>77</sup>

At his uncle de Carini's house, there was a painting of John of the Cross<sup>78</sup> holding a jug of water and a dry loaf of bread in his prison cell. De Beaurecueil was so impressed by the sanctity of John of the Cross and his demeanor that he decided to become a Carmelite. He writes,

<sup>75</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 128.

<sup>76</sup> Pérennès *Georges Anawati*, 128.

<sup>77</sup> De Beaurecueil, «La vie comme aventure » 2.

<sup>78</sup> See *The Collected Works of Saint John of the Cross*, trans. Kavanaugh, K. and O. Rodriguez. (Washington, DC: Ics Pubns, 1991).

*Et puis, il y avait cette Vie des saints, feuilletée inlassablement chez l'oncle de Carini, le jeudi soir, après la réunion des louveteaux. Saint Jean de la Croix, représenté en extase, dans sa prison, vêtu de bure et de son manteau blanc, 'bouclé' par ses frères, qui le jugeaient dangereux et 'subversif'! Je décidai de me faire carme.<sup>79</sup>*

Nevertheless, at the age of thirteen, during a summer vacation at Mer-les-Bains in Normandie, he met l'Abbé Aquity. This fortunate encounter would change the course of his life and alter his dream forever. De Beaurecueil recounts his meeting with l'Abbé Aquity:

*J'avais 13 ans quand on nous emmena en vacances à Mer-les-Bains, en Normandie. C'était notre découverte de la mer. A l'hôtel, en villégiature, un prêtre barbu prenait seul ses repas, l'Abbé Aquity - je n'ai jamais oublié son nom. Nous fîmes connaissance. Un jour qu'il faisait trop froid pour se baigner, il me proposa une promenade jusqu'à la statue de la Vierge, qui dominait la falaise. En cours de route, il me demanda: «Et que penses-tu faire plus tard? ... Je veux me faire religieux et entrer chez les carmes. Chez les carmes, tu les connais? Je n'en ai jamais rencontré..., mais St Jean de la Croix, sainte Thérèse, la vie austère... Crois moi! J'ai longtemps vécu en Terre sainte, je connais bien les carmes. Par contre, pourquoi ne te ferais tu pas dominicain? A Jérusalem, j'ai fréquenté l'École biblique. Je te verrais très bien chez eux.<sup>80</sup>*

Upon his return from Mer-les-Bains, de Beaurecueil searches for a Dominican priory in his area. Fortunately he finds one at rue Faubourg-Saint Honoré and follows Abbé Aquity's advice. He writes,

*Sa remarque m'est restée en mémoire et un jour je me suis présenté à la porterie 2 rue du Faubourg St. Honoré, il y avait là le père Kételair qui m'a dit: 'Tu tombes bien, je suis le procureur.' Il m'a fait visiter toute la maison du grenier à la cave, j'ai trouvé l'endroit formidable, j'ai choisi d'être Dominicain.<sup>81</sup>*

On a different occasion, he thought back to his visit at the Dominican priory and the hospitality of friar Kételair. There was a sharp distinction between de Beaurecueil's description of his childhood abode and his first impressions of the Dominican priory at rue Faubourg-Saint-Honoré. He notes about father Kételair's hospitality:

<sup>79</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 14.

<sup>80</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 14 - 15.

<sup>81</sup> De Beaurecueil, «La vie come aventure, » 2.

*Quel accueil! Il me fit visiter la maison, de fond en comble. Tout me plut: l'habit blanc, le silence, cette fresque de Desvallieres dans le cloître, la clarté des locaux, la psalmodie, le sourire des frères croisés dans les couloirs, je ne sais quelle atmosphère qui respirait la joie. Adieu, les carmes! Bien sûr, père Aquity, je me ferai dominicain.*<sup>82</sup>

After four years of steady correspondence and regular contacts with the Dominicans at rue Faubourg-Saint-Honoré, de Beaurecueil decided to enter the novitiate in Amiens. In the meantime, his father did not take his son's desire to become a Dominican seriously. He hoped that the experience would be brief once the youngster discovered the austerity of religious life. However, thanks to friar Périnelle's persuasion, the novice master at the time, Pierre de Beaurecueil did not oppose his son's decision to enter the novitiate. Therefore, in October 14, 1935, de Beaurecueil joined the Dominican province of France. Later, he remarked that his father was in the chapel when he received the Dominican habit.<sup>83</sup> His choice to become a friar preacher opened the doors to the fulfillment of his childhood dreams, to go as far as possible. In a posthumous tribute to de Beaurecueil, André Velter writes «*Né à Paris en 1917 dans une famille vite désunie, le garçon ne songeait qu'à des engagements décisifs qui le mèneraient le plus loin possible, et Dieu lui fut un maître libérateur.*»<sup>84</sup> Velter forecasted precisely de Beaurecueil's life long search to find in the farthest lands the face of the divine. In his own words, he brings his childhood drama to a hopeful conclusion: «*Chienne d'enfance! Mais bénie, admirable, indispensable pour aller à Kaboul. Elle fut un 'appel' à décoller, à s'envoler très haut et très loin, sans transigeance. Les gosses 'paumés', je les connaissais par expérience.*»<sup>85</sup> Finally, he found a family in the Order of Preachers.

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<sup>82</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 15.

<sup>83</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 15.

<sup>84</sup> Velter, «La disparition de Serge,» [http:// www.Poezibao.typepad.com/ poezibao/2005/la disparition .html](http://www.Poezibao.typepad.com/poezibao/2005/la_disparition.html). (access, October 13, 2010.)

<sup>85</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 14.

## 2 Le Saulchoir<sup>86</sup>

### 2-1 A School of theology.

In 1903, the French government of Emile Combes (d. 1921) enforced rigorous policies of a strict separation of Church and State.<sup>87</sup> Many religious institutes were expelled from France and the French Dominicans had to move their formation house from Flavigny-sur Ozerain (Côte d'Or) to Belgium.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the Dominicans of the French province relocated to Tournai, where Le Saulchoir was situated. The building was an old monastery abandoned by Cistercian nuns and called Le Saulchoir because of a stand of willows (*saules* in French) at the edge of a pond in the yard. After almost 35 years in Tournai, the Dominican studium returned to France in 1939 and relocated at Étiolles, (a few kilometers from Soisy-sur-Seine). During the years of exile in Belgium, and upon return to France, Le Saulchoir was a hallmark of scholarship and intellectual excellence. Most of the best minds of the Order of Preachers who would influence the Second Vatican Council were alumni of Le Saulchoir.

At the studium of Le Sauchoir in Kain and Étiolles, the Dominican community lived a quasi-monastic life away from city noise and mundane preoccupations. But the friars were deeply aware of 'the signs of the times.' Le Saulchoir was at the beginning under the aegis of two great minds Ambroise Gardeil (d. 1931) and Pierre Mandonnet (d. 1936).<sup>89</sup>

<sup>86</sup> The best book on Le Saulchoir is Marie Dominique Chenu, *Une école de Théologie: Le Saulchoir*: (Paris: Cerf, 1985). See also Avon, *Les frères*, 184 - 86.

<sup>87</sup> Emile Combes was Prime Minister of France from 1902 to 1905. The famous Law of 1905 that organized the relationship between the Church and the State was voted into law by his government.

<sup>88</sup> Jean-Baptiste Henry Lacordaire (d. 1861), re-established the Dominican Order in France in 1837, after the Revolution of 1789. The Dominican Province of Paris established its first priory in 1865 in Flavigny (Côte-d'Or). But in 1884, the Dominicans moved the priory to Corbara (Corsica) and returned to Flavigny ten years later in 1894, where they remained until their expulsion. In 1903, the history of Le Saulchoir started. At the *studium generale* of Le Saulchoir, the French Dominicans established the departments of philosophy and theology and by 1937 there were 22 professors and 125 students. See Chenu, *Une école*, 7.

<sup>89</sup> See H. D. Gardeil, *L'oeuvre theologique du Père Ambroise Gardeil* (Le Saulchoir: Etiolles par Soisy-sur-Seine: 1956), also Ambroise Gardeil, *Le donné révélé et la théologie*. (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1910),

Gardeil's epoch making book, *Le donné révélé et la théologie*, stressed the primacy of the revealed word over tradition. In the words of Chenu, Gardeil's book was the "breviary of Le Saulchoir's method for intellectual work and theology."<sup>90</sup> The Dominicans at Le Saulchoir referred to its spirit, approach, and perspective in their study and writings. For his part, Mandonnet insisted on the historical study of medieval texts. As a scholar and historian of medieval philosophy, Mandonnet had for decades published a series of studies that placed the writings of Aquinas in their historical and cultural perspectives and provided Le Saulchoir with the methodology of a new orientation. In 1937, Le Saulchoir became a Pontifical University and the great medievalist Chenu was appointed Regent of Studies and the first Rector of the institution.<sup>91</sup> As noted earlier, both during its days in Tournai and Étiolles, Le Saulchoir hosted remarkable friars including erudite and prolific theologians like Antonin-Dalmace Sertillanges<sup>92</sup>, Antoine Dondaine, Gerard des Lauriers, and Yves Congar; biblical scholars like Roland de Vaux and Pierre Benoit; liturgists like Pierre Mary Gy and Irenée Dalmas; pastoral and moral theologians like Albert Plé, Pierre Liégé and Pie Régamey, as well as Dominicans from other provinces like Edward Schillebeeckx, (Dutch born in Belgium), Fergus Kerr (from the Blackfriars in England). These friars worked intensely and those years were extremely productive. A case in point is that, in 1907, they

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Pierre Mandonnet, «Des écrits authentiques de St. Thomas d'Aquin,» *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes*, vol. 72, no. 1, (1911): 133 - 35; and «Saint Dominique: l'idée, l'homme et l'oeuvre,» *Revue d'Histoire de l'Église de France*, vol. 25, no. 106. (1939): 50 – 53; also Pierre Mandonnet et Jean Destrez, *Bibliographie thomiste* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1960).

<sup>90</sup> Chenu, *Une école*, 40.

<sup>91</sup> See the following books by Chenu, *Introduction à l'étude de St. Thomas d'Aquin*. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1950); *St. Thomas d'Aquin et la théologie*, (Paris: Seuil, 1959); *La théologie au 12<sup>e</sup> siècle*, (Paris: J. Vrin, 1957); *La théologie comme science au 13<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1943); *La théologie est-elle une science?* (Paris: Fayard, 1957).

<sup>92</sup> In *Jules Monchanin Prêtre 1895 – 1957*, Françoise Jacquin quotes Monchanin's admiration for Sertillange's *Saint Thomas d'Aquin*. In *Lettres à sa mère*, Jules writes: «Il y a là de la métaphysique éperdue sur Dieu, de l'être en général. C'est superbe de profondeur et de sublimité! On y sent là le frisson de la vérité pure et on ressent quelque chose de la contemplation du vrai qui fait le bonheur des élus.» 27.

published an epoch-making review, the *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*.<sup>93</sup> The Dominican friars at Le Saulchoir were doing for theology and philosophy what Marie Joseph Lagrange (d. 1938) was doing for scriptural studies. At a time when ecclesiastical training was for the most part accomplished by using theology manuals –second hand and third hand accounts of the data of scriptures, the Fathers, the councils of the church, and the great schools of theology – Le Saulchoir’s friars argued for theological formation that used primary sources and embraced Gardeil’s and Mandonnet’s critical methodologies in every branch of ecclesial studies. The friars called for the absolute necessity to integrate historical-criticism in all aspects of Catholic theology. The modernist crisis at the beginning of the 20th century and historical criticism had shattered the Catholic *weltanschauung*. Chenu summarizes the task:

*Après une longue incubation, se trouvèrent mis en cause les fondements historiques et philosophiques de la foi, et par là tout l’édifice de la connaissance religieuse, depuis l’expérience élémentaire jusqu’à la théologie scholastique, depuis le donné évangélique jusqu’au formulaire ecclésiastique.*<sup>94</sup>

In addition to historical criticism and engagement with modernity, Chenu called upon the Dominican friars of France to take seriously the study of world religions. His first intuition as a medievalist was the influence of Muslim and Arab philosophy on Latin medieval philosophy and theology, particularly Thomism. Chenu raised fundamental questions about the nature of Catholic theology in terms of its methodology and pedagogy (how it was taught in seminaries and pontifical schools). He tried to rethink the fundamental relationship between theology and history on the one hand, and faith and theology on the other. Chenu was a well-spring of daring ideas and had the intelligence to forecast

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<sup>93</sup> The *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* is a quarterly review published with the assistance of the CNRS and Le Centre National du Livre, and edited by the Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin. The French Dominicans still run the review today.

<sup>94</sup> Chenu, *Une école*, 36; Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 56.



necessary theological and ecclesial turns. Hence, in 1937, he wrote a little pamphlet destined to shake the ground on how Dominican friars were educated, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*. Claude Geffré calls it «*son petit livre-programme*.»<sup>95</sup> In an interview with Jacques Duquenes, *Un théologien en liberté*, Chenu recounts the circumstances of the book's inception:

*Ce petit livre est né tout à fait à l'improviste. Il était de tradition d'organiser une célébration le jour de la Saint-Thomas; c'est une très bonne occasion de prendre conscience de la conviction qui nous anime. C'est ce que j'ai fait dans un exposé que je prononçai en tant que recteur. L'exposé avait impressionné professeurs et étudiants et ceux-ci prirent mes notes pour les publier. Mais, comme il s'agissait quand même d'une improvisation, je décidai de rédiger un texte un peu plus consistant, dans lequel je développai nos idées sur la méthode historique.*<sup>96</sup>

As a theologian and medievalist, Chenu saw clearly that:

*L'intelligence du mystère n'est perceptible que dans l'histoire où elle se déroule, dans une histoire sainte. C'est évidemment aller à l'encontre d'une conception intemporelle de la théologie, savoir immobile à travers le temps et l'espace. La voici, la théologie, entraînée dans le relativisme, c'est-à-dire dans le jeu complexe des relations qui modifient continuellement non plus, bien sur, le contenu radical de la foi, mais ses expressions.*<sup>97</sup>

This period of formation was crucial for de Beaurecueil and for the entire community at Le Saulchoir. They had to rethink the Catholic approach to history, philosophy, hermeneutics and other faith traditions. The work of a theologian, as Chenu saw it, had to include the historical method (history and historicity). In other words, historical situations and circumstances, the limitations of theological formulations, and dissent in theological matters were part of a theologian's worldview and epistemology. Chenu questioned the pertinence of neo-thomism and neo-scholasticism that had dominated Catholic theological imagination for centuries. Under his tutelage, de Beaurecueil learned to cut against the grain, to listen to the movement of the Spirit and to be bold in his choices.

<sup>95</sup> Chenu, *L'hommage différé au Père Chenu* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 1.

<sup>96</sup> Chenu, *Une école*, 7.

<sup>97</sup> Chenu, *Une école*, 8.

Chenu's revolutionary view did not fare too well in Catholic circles, particularly in Rome.<sup>98</sup>

In 1942, Chenu was silenced and his book banned by Rome and put on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* by Pope Pius XII. However, history has its way of vindicating forerunners. Indeed, twenty years later, the Second Vatican Council 1962-65, under Pope John XXIII, started an '*aggiornamento*.' It was a coronation of Chenu's positions. It was also during that council that the Catholic Church's theology toward other faith traditions would change drastically. If the conciliar document of Vatican II *Nostra Aetate* was not bold enough in Chenu's view, *Gaudium et Spes*<sup>99</sup> definitely vindicated his position in terms of the role and views of the Roman Catholic Church in the modern world. Chenu's solid theological understanding, erudite historical insights, intuition and remarkable creativity cost him dearly but also resulted in fruitful new departures that have remained classical resources for contemporary theology, particularly for French Dominicans' engagement with the Arab and Muslim world.

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<sup>98</sup> After the publication of *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*, Chenu was forbidden to teach and publish any book or article. One could even say that unlike Yves Congar, who was finally rehabilitated and made Cardinal at the end of his life, Chenu was vindicated by history but the ecclesial hierarchy never forgave his prophetic and daring theological intuitions. The title, *L'hommage différé au Père Chenu*, summarizes perfectly the legacy of Chenu's work.

It is important to remark that if many French Dominicans spearheaded the *ressourcement* and *nouvelle théologie*, their approach would soon be scrutinized by the Roman Curia and the headquarters of the Dominican order (Santa Sabina) in Rome. Opponents to the theological and pastoral positions of Chenu and his colleagues (Y. Congar, M. Féret, L. Charlier) at Le Saulchoir staged a forceful opposition. In France, it was the Dominicans from Toulouse Province at Saint-Maximin's priory who formulated a response under the title '*Sagesse*.' The document was a direct rebuttal of Chenu's book, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*. Three Dominicans led the movement in Rome: Michael Brown, at the time rector of the Angelicum (the university of the Order in Rome), and later Master-General, Cardinal, R. Garrigou-Lagrange, professor at the Angelicum and Chenu's dissertation director in 1920, and Mariano Cordovani, theologian of the Holy Office. These three Roman Dominicans prepared the way for the condemnation of the *nouvelle théologie* and Le Saulchoir's approach in 1950 with the encyclical "*Humani Generis*." The Second Vatican Council reversed the devastating judgment of Garrigou Lagrange and his comrades-in-arms and ended the epoch of the modernist crisis, from Pius IX to Pius XII (1846 to 1958). The Council's texts: *Nuntius ad Universum homines* (The Message to Humanity) and *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution) show clearly that Chenu's call for the Church's engagement with the modern world was taken seriously. See Ulrich Engel, "The Question of Modernity" trans. Bonifatius Hicks, o.p., *St Dominic's Priory*; Brussels, 14/01/2004, 1-9. Antonio Franco, *Marie-Dominique Chenu* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2003); Olivier de la Brosse, *Le père Chenu: la liberté de la foi* (Paris: Cerf, 1996)

<sup>99</sup> See Flannery, *Vatican Council II*.

Furthermore, Chenu sought to instill in Le Saulchoir's community a way of doing theology and a search for the truth rooted in the Dominican tradition of St. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart. Chenu and the friars at Le Saulchoir fit squarely into a long Dominican tradition of scholarship. Their methodology harkens back to the Dominican scholastic period. Like Aquinas who dared incorporate Aristotelian philosophy into a medieval world dominated by Augustinian and neo-platonic philosophy, the friars at Le Saulchoir sought to incorporate modern sciences and questions into their theological and philosophical endeavors. Chenu insisted that theologians must keep their eyes on the signs of the times by discerning possible 'seeds of the Word' or the inchoate reality of the reign of God, as Vatican II sees Christian vocation. Anawati, Jomier, and de Beaurecueil were all fruits of Chenu's intelligent and prophetic foresight.<sup>100</sup> Jean Pierre Jossua summed up Chenu's life in these words: "His fundamental optimism and communicative genius made him an incomparable brother and teacher. The French Dominicans owe to him the splendid vitality of this period of their lives, and so does the church much more than it has ever been willing to acknowledge."<sup>101</sup>

## **2-2 A Dominican Studium**

De Beaurecueil was nineteen when he arrived at Le Saulchoir de Kain in Belgium in 1936. He had already started learning Arabic at Lycée de Janson de Sailly in Paris, a move that would serve him well later on. After a year of novitiate in Amiens, he started his study in Catholic theology and philosophy along with his senior brothers Jomier and Anawati who were already there. Chenu would have a decisive role in the direction their lives would

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<sup>100</sup> See Jomier's, Anawati's and de Beaurecueil's articles in *Hommage*, 58 - 83. Chenu's famous line «*Islam comme vocation*» became the driving force within and among these friars in Cairo. See «Vocation en 'terre d'Islam,'» Avon, *Les frères*, 311 – 20.

<sup>101</sup> Jean Pierre Jossua, o.p. «La mort du Père M. D. Chenu, » *Le Monde*, Feb. 13. 1990.

take. It was at Le Saulchoir and under Chenu's persistent call that the Dominican investment in the Arab and Muslim world would take a providential turn. At Le Saulchoir, Chenu groomed a number of Dominican brothers for serious study of Islam and Muslim societies. He wanted the brethren to study Islam as a way of salvation in order to correct long historical misconceptions about Muslims. At the time, the wave of *la nouvelle théologie* and the Catholic *ressourcement* movement deeply questioned Catholic theology and its triumphant and arrogant views of other faith traditions.

At Le Saulchoir, de Beaurecueil became the third member of a core team destined to Islamic studies. Chenu protected the trio against any attempts to assign Jomier, Anawati, and de Beaurecueil to a different task. Many times he would intervene to cancel assignment orders with regard to them.<sup>102</sup> Thus, from 1936 to 1939, de Beaurecueil delved into the classical Dominican formation with an eye on Islamic studies. Theology and philosophy at Le Saulchoir were taught in the context of a renewed understanding of Thomism. Besides, classical courses in Catholic and Thomistic tradition, Chenu introduced the trio to Massignon and encouraged them to attend his lectures while Massignon was professor at the Collège de France. Morelon reports Chenu's recollection of Massignon's first visit to the Dominican studium at Le Saulchoir de Kain:

*Nouvel événement intéressant: M. Massignon, professeur d'histoire de la civilisation arabe au Collège de France, étant allé faire une conférence à Louvain, téléphone de Bruxelles où il séjournait pour demander si on pouvait le recevoir entre deux trains, de midi ½ à deux ½. Le P. Synave, qui le connaissait, lui fit excellent accueil, et nous nous réunîmes pour le recevoir. Sur la suggestion de P. Mandonnet, M. Massignon venait demander quelle collaboration, nous «latinistes médiévistes», nous pourrions apporter aux «arabisants médiévistes», pour l'étude des rapports entre les philosophies arabe et latine au XIIIe siècle.<sup>103</sup>*

<sup>102</sup> Chenu, *L'Hommage différé*, 59.

<sup>103</sup> Morelon, «L'IDEO», *MD*, 19.

During four years of intense study in the Dominican tradition, de Beaurecueil achieved a deeper understanding of his Dominican call. Unfortunately, in 1939, the Second World War broke out and he had to interrupt his studies at Le Saulchoir. He was called to military service in the city of Djounieh in Lebanon. At the time, Lebanon was a French protectorate. He recalls his military service:

*Ayant appris qu'au Liban des "détachés militaires" étaient mis à la disposition d'établissements scolaires, je posai ma candidature, histoire de faire connaissance avec l'Orient: je fus admis dans le collège religieux à Djounieh, pour y enseigner le français. Pour m'y rendre, je pris le chemin des écoliers: -l'Italie, la Grèce,- avec l'intention d'y aller visiter le mont Athos -la Turquie, la Syrie.* <sup>104</sup>

Throughout the entire year, his hopes to practice his Arabic, learned at his high school, and to encounter the Orient and its people were curtailed by dire military restrictions due to the war. His first hand experience with Muslim culture was a disappointment. He remarks, «Pour 'découvrir' un pays, ses habitants, sa culture il n'est pas de pires conditions que celles de la vie d'un soldat dans une petite garnison peuplée de légionnaires. Du fait de l'uniforme, les rapports sont faussés.» <sup>105</sup> This first encounter with this Arab land and people was far from ideal. However, his experience in Lebanon did not crush his desire to fully heed Chenu's call for a scientific investigation of Islam and Muslim civilization.

De Beaurecueil stayed in Djounieh for eight months; then he was sent back to France. Finally, he spent two months in Mont-Clergeon, near Rūmilly, in Haute-Savoie, where he volunteered to work with young people in a program called *Les jeunes des chantiers de jeunesse*.<sup>106</sup> In June 1940, he was discharged from the military and re-entered Le Saulchoir in order to complete his studies. Toward the end of his theological studies and mostly building upon his experience in Lebanon, de Beaurecueil enrolled at *l'École*

<sup>104</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 17.

<sup>105</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 18.

<sup>106</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 18.

*nationale des langues orientales* in Paris to continue his studies of Arabic. It was there that he developed a deeper relationship with Massignon. The latter would have a decisive influence on de Beaurecueil in terms of what Chenu called «*L'islam comme vocation.*» In so many ways, Massignon's honest, generous, and at times controversial views of Islam sank deep into de Beaurecueil's consciousness.<sup>107</sup> As a result, he read and studied Anṣārī in the footsteps of Massignon's study of al-Ḥallāj. Although, there was a communion of thought in terms of epistemology and hermeneutics between the two Orientalists, de Beaurecueil and Massignon did differ.<sup>108</sup> Avon is correct in noting that de Beaurecueil departed to a certain degree from both Massignon's Ḥallājism and Gardet's neo-thomism. He notes: Muḥammad

*Au début, j'ai beaucoup aimé les articles de Gardet. Par la suite, j'ai pris mes distances, comme à l'égard de Massignon d'ailleurs. Je n'aime pas son [Gardet] néo-thomisme, notamment la distinction entre mystique 'naturelle' et mystique 'surnaturelle.' Je n'aime pas non plus la propension (due à Massignon) à faire de Ḥallāj le sommet de la mystique musulmane.*<sup>109</sup>

In 1943, de Beaurecueil completed his theological studies at Le Saulchoir with a Doctorate in theology,<sup>110</sup> and earned a licentiate in Arabic literature from *l'École nationale des langues orientales*,<sup>111</sup> was ordained priest in the Order of Preachers by Cardinal Suhard.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>107</sup> De Beaurecueil would eventually find his own expression and understanding of “*le mystère de l'islam dans la providence divine.*” Massignon's love affair with Islam through al-Ḥallāj raised concerned among some Christian orientalists. Even Anawati had some serious reservations about his approach. Massignon's theology of intercession (*badaliyya*), his understanding of the prophethood of Muḥammad, “*le prophète négatif*,” and his view of Islam as the fulfillment of God's promise to Ishmaël were not accepted in all Catholic circles. His disciple Youakim Moubarac will be a major support to his ideas. See Avon, *Les frères*, 855 – 863.

<sup>108</sup> See chapter three of this dissertation.

<sup>109</sup> Avon, *Les frères*, 728. He cites from a letter that Serge wrote in Paris in may 2003.

<sup>110</sup> First, de Beaurecueil wrote a thesis entitled “*L'homme, image de Dieu, selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (june 1944) for a Licentiate in theology. Two years later, he completed his theological studies with an expanded version entitled “*L'homme, image de Dieu, selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin. Études sur l'élaboration et la portée d'une doctrine théologique* (Le Saulchoir, 1946). In Catholic pontifical seminaries of the time, this later degree was similar to a doctorate and the holder could teach theology in catholic seminaries or pontifical schools.

<sup>111</sup> “*Founding members: Serge de Beaurecueil.*” @ www. IDEO.org.

<sup>112</sup> Mérioux, «*Mystique Dominicain*,» *Sources*, 288.

At this time Anawati and Jomier moved to Cairo in order to establish a Dominican center for Islamic studies and Muslim societies. This project launched in 1938 by both the Dominican Order and the Vatican, could finally be implemented. Thus, de Beaurecueil, Anawati, Jomier, and to certain extent Dominique- Jacques Boilot (d. 1989) were the pioneers of the Dominican Institute of Oriental Studies in Cairo (IDEO). De Beaurecueil arrived in Cairo in 1946. At the IDEO, he continued his study of Arabic, learned Persian, and specialized in Islamic mysticism. On this note, in order to situate de Beaurecueil in a lineage and fully understand the French Dominican province's involvement with the Arab and Muslim world, it is important to place their endeavor in the larger context of the Order of Preacher's history with Islam since the establishment of the IDEO.

### 3 Cairo

Georges Anawati, Jacques Jomier, and Serge de Beaurecueil, the three founding members of the IDEO, formed an unusual trio in terms of personalities, destinies, and talents. Even though these friars shared bourgeois and upper-class upbringing they were very different in temperament. Avon speaks of «une équipe fondatrice bigarrée.»<sup>113</sup> Their success remains a historical achievement. For decades, these three friars (with the help of countless others) managed against all odds to anchor Dominican scholarship on Islam and Muslim civilization among the best in Catholic circles and in the world. These three friars' success was built upon an original idea of Marie Joseph Lagrange (d. 1938), the handiwork of Antonin Jaussen (d. 1962) who built the house, and Chenu's adamant belief in *L'Évangile dans le Temps*, *La liberté dans la foi*, and *La foi dans l'intelligence*.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Avon, *Les frères*, 446.

<sup>114</sup> See Chenu's, *La parole de Dieu: La foi dans l'intelligence*, vol. 1 and *L'Évangile dans le temps* vol. 2 (Paris: Cerf, 1964); Olivier de la Brosse, *La liberté dans la foi: Père Chenu* (Paris: Cerf, 1969); and Jacques Duquesne *interroge le père Chenu: un théologien en liberté*. (Paris: Centurion, 1975).

The foundation of the Dominican house in Cairo was first the dream of Lagrange. At the *École biblique*<sup>115</sup> Lagrange directed his students to investigate the entire land of the Bible scientifically in terms of exegesis, Semitic languages, history, geography, epigraphy and archeology. He added study travels to various sites mentioned in the biblical narratives. According to Lagrange, “the bible was to be read in the land in which it was written. It was to be studied in the physical and cultural context that gave it birth.”<sup>116</sup> Lagrange had the extraordinary talent of spotting genius in young Dominicans friars. In a decade, he selected and formed the first generation of astonishingly talented young Dominicans in biblical studies like Antonin Jaussen, a specialist of Arab ethnography; Louis-Hugues Vincent (d. 1960), who is considered the father of Palestinian archeology; Antoine Raphaël Savignac (d. 1951), an excellent Semetic epigraphist; Felix-Marie Abel’s (d. 1953), a scholar whose erudition and keen critical sense resulted in an incomparable mastery of the history and geography of Palestine; and Edourd-Paul Dhorme (d. 1966) who was an Assyriologist and the first to decipher Ugaritic.<sup>117</sup> In Lagrange’s foresight and vision, Cairo in Egypt was a natural destination where students of biblical studies could be initiated to archeology and Egyptology. Almost a century after Napoleon Bonaparte’s expedition to Egypt (1798 - 1801), the French had established in 1898 the IFAO,<sup>118</sup> which would be an undeniable support to the Dominican Biblical scholars in terms of Egyptology and the archeology of

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<sup>115</sup> See Bernard Montagnes, o.p. *The Story of Father Marie-Joseph Lagrange*, trans. Benedict Viviano, (Mahwah, NJ, 2006). The author summarizes Lagrange’s life:

The story of father Lagrange, founder of the *Ecole biblique* in Jerusalem, is the story of the struggle within the Catholic Church for responsible academic freedom in the tradition of St Thomas. Steeped by faith and utterly devoted to the church, Father Lagrange strove to apply the latest historical-critical method to his biblical studies, to demystify the scriptures, and to make them available to the average Catholic. And yet, the church authorities blocked the publication of his commentaries on the Book of Genesis. (an excerpt from the Jacket). Lagrange was a partisan of the encyclical *Providentissimum Deus* of Pope Leo XIII, inviting scholars to solve the difficulties created by a rationalistic approach of the Bible through an exegesis that would be at the same time rooted in tradition.

<sup>116</sup> “History” [www.ebaf.info](http://www.ebaf.info).

<sup>117</sup> “History” [www.ebaf.info](http://www.ebaf.info).

<sup>118</sup> See [www.ifao.egnet.net](http://www.ifao.egnet.net)



Ancient Egypt. As a seasoned scholar, Lagrange understood the historical and cultural importance of Cairo. He wrote:

*Le grand intérêt de la fondation, c'est que, le Caire étant la capitale intellectuelle de l'Islam et le centre d'un important mouvement d'études européennes, il y a un intérêt considérable à posséder un établissement d'études religieuses supérieures, qui préparerait les esprits des Musulmans pour un avenir éloigné, imposerait le respect à la science laïque, attirerait les schismatiques et confirmerait les catholiques dans leur foi. [...] Si je vous parle avec tant d'insistance d'une école, c'est pour vous indiquer ce que je regarde comme le but total de la fondation, qu'il importe d'avoir sous les yeux dès le début; mais il y a toujours d'énormes avantages à commencer petitement, sans faire trop de bruit.*<sup>119</sup>

Hence, he sought to build a kind of *pied à terre* in the service of the *École biblique*. He added:

*Il serait honorable pour l'Eglise catholique de posséder au Caire un institut d'études sur l'Egypte Chrétienne, sans parler des études d'égyptologie ancienne et d'étude de l'arabe. Le Caire est de beaucoup le foyer intellectuel le plus important de l'islamisme; il possède une très importante école d'égyptologie. L'Eglise doit aussi être présente par un institut d'études.*<sup>120</sup>

Therefore in 1911, Lagrange officially proposed to the Dominican Province of France, gathered at Le Saulchoir de Kain, the project of founding a house in Cairo, which would include an institute of study (Egyptology in connection with biblical studies) and a little apostolic team to support spiritually the small Latin community of Cairo.<sup>121</sup> The city of Cairo seemed a natural choice since the most prestigious Sunni Islamic Seminary-University (al-Azhar) for the formation and education of Muslim religious leaders and scholars, from Indonesia to Senegal via Europe, was in the capital city of Egypt. Unfortunately, Lagrange's idea ran into a number of complications mainly because of the difficulties of finding a consensus between the Holy See, the Dominican headquarters in Santa Sabina, St. Etienne's Priory in Jerusalem, and the Province of France.

<sup>119</sup> Morelon, «L'IDEO, » MD, 6.

<sup>120</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 117; Morelon, «L'IDEO,» MD, 6; Avon, *Les frères*, 51 - 53.

<sup>121</sup> Morelon, «L'IDEO, » MD, 4; Avon, *Les frères*, 56.

Luckily, Friar M. A. Jaussen, from the province of Lyon, would bring Lagrange's hope to fruition. As noted earlier, Jaussen was a professor at the *École biblique* of Jerusalem where he taught Oriental archeology, ethnography, Arabic and Sabeian script. He spent a great deal of his study in anthropological research among the Bedouins of the region. From 1895 to 1925, Jaussen and A. R. Savignac (d. 1951) traveled through the region to document the people's way of life. Jaussen was one of the first western scholars to delve in Arab and Middle Eastern anthropology. His books, *Coutumes des Arabes au pays de Moab et Coutumes palestiniennes-Naplouse et son district*, and *Mission archéologique en Arabie (mars - mai 1907)*, are classics in the field of Arab Bedouins' ethnography and anthropology.<sup>122</sup> During the First World War, he traveled all around the Middle East working for the French and British alike.

Jaussen settled in Egypt in 1928. Up until 1932, he lived alone and worked tirelessly to raise money to build the Dominican house in Cairo. In 1931, thanks to his relationship with King Fuad (d. 1936), he bought a piece of property at half price in the name of the *École biblique* in 'Abbāsiyya. According to the contract with the Egyptian authorities, the Dominican house was affiliated to St. Etienne in Jerusalem and its sole purpose and vocation would be scientific.<sup>123</sup> Clearly, no proselytism would be allowed, otherwise they would lose their property. By 1935 the main part of the building was completed. As Morelon explains, «*Tel qu'il est exprimé par le Père Jaussen, le but de cette fondation est assez proche, dans le principe, de celui du Père Lagrange lors de sa première tentative,*

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<sup>122</sup> Grace Glueck, 'The Holy Land Through the Eyes of the Explorers' *New York Time*, august 10/2001. The article reports on an exposition in New York of archival collections of photographs by the *École biblique* in Jerusalem sponsored by the American Biblical Society. Many of the photographs were taken by A. R. Savignac and A. Jaussen during their study travels in Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the Sinai, the Negev, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey. See <http://mobia.org/exhibitions/the-holy-land-through-the-eyes-of-explorers#slideshow1>

<sup>123</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 120. and Morelon, "L'IDEO," *MD*, 10.

*mais beaucoup plus ambitieux.»*<sup>124</sup> However, Lagrange's dream took a long time to come to fruition. Lagrange conceived the idea, and Jaussen built the priory, Chenu imagined the decisive turn and Anawati led the first crew on the ground. The friar who held things together between Jaussen and Anawati was Marie Dominique Boulanger (d. 1961). He was the first to be assigned to Cairo and arrived in 1932. He would take over after Jaussen moved to Alexandria where he settled permanently in 1937.<sup>125</sup>

In Cairo, Boulanger and another new comer, Anselme-Bertrand Carrière (d. 1957), would devote themselves to the pastoral care of the French Catholics of the Latin rite and the Dominican Third Order founded by friar Martin Rousseau (d. 1940) in 1910.<sup>126</sup> Boulanger and Carrière maintained the Dominican presence until the decisive turn initiated by Chenu in 1938. Meanwhile, Boulanger took great care of the priory and founded in 1933 the "Thomist Circle" of Cairo. The Circle was an intellectual, cultural, and religious forum and a veritable formation place for the French speaking community associated with the Dominicans. Jaussen, Lagrange, and other members of the *École biblique* came often to give conferences.<sup>127</sup> A year later in 1934, the Circle printed its first bimonthly journal, "*Cahiers du Cercle Thomiste.*"<sup>128</sup> The *Cahiers* were the printed versions of the conferences given by Dominican friars and lay scholars who were members of the Third Order. Unfortunately, the original goal of the institution – Egyptology related to biblical studies – seemed forgotten. Also, in terms of Islamic studies there was no resident scholar yet.

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<sup>124</sup> Morelon, "L'IDEO," *MD*, 11.

<sup>125</sup> Morelon believes that a number of conflicting issues developed between M. D. Boulanger and A. Jaussen, particularly, in terms of the vision assigned to the priory. A. Jaussen insisted on the scientific and academic role of the institution while M. D. Boulanger opted for a pastoral one.

<sup>126</sup> Avon, *Les frères*, 40 - 45.

<sup>127</sup> Years later, Anawati, Jomier, and de Beaurecueil would be the main lecturers of the *Cercle Thomiste*. Other eminent scholars such as L. Massignon and many lay men and women also gave lectures.

<sup>128</sup> Morelon, «L'IDEO», *MD*, 15.

Jaussen, nonetheless, had sown the seeds of a solid network that would greatly benefit the friars later. Morelon remarks:

*Il faut souligner enfin que la réputation intellectuelle du P. Jaussen et le réseau de relations qu'il avait tissé en Egypte seront très précieux pour les trois premiers membres de l'Institut à partir de 1944, et cela leur permettra localement d'avoir dès le départ une plus grande crédibilité.<sup>129</sup>*

The Dominican house in Cairo started to function at the end of 1932 under the leadership of Boulanger. The decisive turn in terms of its destiny took place in the academic year 1937-1938 at the studium of Le Saulchoir d'Etiolles, thousands miles away from Cairo. Chenu, dean of the studium,<sup>130</sup> asked some student brothers to volunteer for a scientific study of Islam and its civilization. This initiative almost coincided with Cardinal Eugène Tisserant's (d. 1972), Secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental churches, request on behalf of the Vatican to the Dominican Order to initiate a committee for Islamic studies. Tisserant's first intuitions were to support the Oriental Christian minority. First he met with the Missionaries of Africa (the white fathers) in Tunis where they had established a study center (IBLA: *Institut des belles-lettres arabes*),<sup>131</sup> then he met the Dominicans. Cardinal Tisserant had been a student of J. M. Lagrange at the *École biblique* and had a real connection to the Order. He asked Martin-Stanislas Gillet (d. 1951), the Master of the Order at the time, to envision a Dominican mission in predominantly Muslim lands. In response, Gillet sent Chenu on a tour in Jerusalem, Cairo, Tunis and Algiers where the Dominicans had priories or houses. Chenu did not reinvent the wheel of Dominican Orientalism but he gave this endeavor a decisive turn.

<sup>129</sup> Morelon, «L'IDEO,» MD, 17; also Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 155; Avon, *Les frères*, 251; and *Historical data*. @ www. IDEO. Org.

<sup>130</sup> At this point the Dominican formation house had returned to France and renamed Le Saulchoir d'Etiolles.

<sup>131</sup> See, www.iblatunis.org

As a medieval historian Chenu believed that a proper understanding of medieval European thought, particularly Thomas Aquinas's, needed a good knowledge of its sources, Islamic philosophy and theology. According to Chenu, European medieval thought was:

*... inintelligible pour une partie de lui-même, si on ne le réfèrait pas, en sous-sol, au monde arabe dans lequel il puisait, comme une source permanente, des éléments essentiels de sa vitalité, tant en pensée philosophique que dans divers éléments des sciences, mathématique, astronomie, médecine.*<sup>132</sup>

The necessity for Dominicans to open a center of Islamic studies had never been so urgent in Chenu's eyes. He adds:

*Pour cela il est nécessaire d'étudier l'islam à fond, directement dans les livres originaux qui en traitent, et non pas dans des traductions plus ou moins fidèles ou dans des exposés faits par à peu-près. Les musulmans lettrés ne vous apprécieront que si vous êtes à même de lire et de discuter un texte arabe ... mais il ne peut être question d'apostolat des musulmans.*<sup>133</sup>

Cardinal Tisserant agreed wholeheartedly:

*Il ne s'agit pas d'un essai de pénétration apostolique directe, qui serait non seulement vain mais objectivement mal ordonné; c'est une tâche préalable et en profondeur qu'il faut entreprendre: connaître l'Islam, son histoire, sa doctrine, sa civilisation, ses sources, et le connaître par des études sérieuses et prolongées auxquelles de vrais apôtres sauront consacrer leur vie.*<sup>134</sup>

Even though there was a lingering colonial conquest and missionary impetus in both Cardinal Tisserant and Gillet, the Master of the Order,<sup>135</sup> Chenu would push vigorously for the idea of Islamic studies for its own sake, away from missionary conquest and zeal. Fortunately for Chenu and the Dominicans, they had a young Arab Christian, Anawati, whose mother tongue was Arabic, and who was eager to learn, brilliant, and hard working

<sup>132</sup> Chenu «La coexistence culturelle de la civilisation arabe maghrébine et de la civilisation occidentale du Moyen Age,» *Confluent*, (1961): 6 - 12.

<sup>133</sup> Chenu, «La coexistence culturelle de la civilisation ...,» *Confluent* (1961) 6 - 12.

<sup>134</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 123.

<sup>135</sup> Avon, "Un homme du magistère catholique devant l'Islam. Le Cardinal Eugène Tisserant (1884 - 1972) in D. Pelletier et al., *Mélanges Etienne Fouilloux*, 13. Avon believes that Tisserant's main concern was the protection and survival of Christian minorities in predominantly Muslim lands. "Tisserant veut protéger les Chrétiens d'Orient du 'péril Musulman'" in, Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 121.

as Pérennès put it.<sup>136</sup> However, it would take a few more years for the Dominicans to have a team on the ground in Cairo. The project of a new approach to Islamic studies within the Catholic Church, particularly for Dominicans, was underway. Hence, the prophetic and almost providential turn at Le Saulchoir with Chenu broke the mold in the history of Dominican Orientalism. This history concludes with the foundation of the IDEO in Cairo, where de Beaurecueil started his Orientalist journey.<sup>137</sup>

## ***II Chenu's Vision***

### **1 The Path to the IDEO**

Very early, as Pérennès notes, de Beaurecueil showed a keen independent spirit and a gift for language. «*Le troisième membre de l'équipe, Serge de Beaurecueil, est lui aussi une forte personnalité.*»<sup>138</sup> Upon arrival in Cairo, de Beaurecueil did not have a solid background in Islamic studies, particularly in Islamic mysticism. At Le Saulchoir, he delved into Catholic thomistic theology. Avon agrees, «*Jusqu'à son arrivée en Egypte, le dominicain [de Beaurecueil] a surtout été absorbé par ses études de théologie, il n'a jamais suivi de cours sur la mystique, ni au Saulchoir ni à l'Université.*»<sup>139</sup> Upon his arrival in Cairo in 1946, de Beaurecueil needed to find a field of research in Islam. On his part, Anawati opted for classical Islamic philosophy, and Jomier chose contemporary Islamic thought and the Qur'ān as a field of scholarship. De Beaurecueil decided on the mystical dimensions of Islam.<sup>140</sup> However, how did he embark on the study of the life and work of

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<sup>136</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 124.

<sup>137</sup> See the first draft of the charter of the IDEO in Moleron, "L'IDEO du Caire." *MD*, 15, 2

<sup>138</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati* 124.

<sup>139</sup> Avon, *Les frères*, 726.

<sup>140</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 127.

‘Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt? Tradition<sup>141</sup> has it among the Dominican friars in Cairo that Anawati prompted de Beaurecueil to have a conversation with Osman Ismā‘īl Yaḥyā (d. 1997).<sup>142</sup> Yaḥyā, at the time, was a student at Cairo’s prestigious University of al-Azhar, and later, would become one of the leading scholars of Ibn ‘Arabī. He was a regular reader at the library of the IDEO and a close friend of the Dominican friars. According to Méricoux, Yaḥyā told de Beaurecueil, “Who am I to counsel you? I can just say this much: by far two Ṣūfī masters have influenced me most: Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 1309) and ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt (d. 1089).”<sup>143</sup> De Beaurecueil took Yaḥyā’s advice seriously and consulted Massignon who wrote back, «*N’hésitez pas! Anṣārī est d’une importance capitale, et personne ne l’a sérieusement étudié. Il y a quelques années, à son tombeau, j’ai passé une nuit entière en prière...*»<sup>144</sup> In addition, an Iraqi Jesuit, Paul Nwyia, was already working on Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh with a remarkable expertise.<sup>145</sup> De Beaurecueil remarks, «*Il eut été stupide d’aller sur ses brisées.*»<sup>146</sup> The only option left was Anṣārī and he concludes, «*Je me décidai pour Anṣārī.*»<sup>147</sup> This episode lends itself into a popular Chinese saying “when the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”

<sup>141</sup> Méricoux, «Un mystique dominicain ...», in *Sources*, 2. Also Pérenneès, *Georges Anawati*, 129. See also IDEO, «Bibliographie de Serge de Beaurecueil, O.P.» in *Les Fondateurs de l’IDEO*. (www.IDEO.org.)

<sup>142</sup> Pérenneès describes Yaḥyā’s relationship with the Dominican friars in Cairo in *Georges Anawati*, 129 and 154 - 55. While a student at al-Azhar, and at the invitation of Anawati, Yaḥyā used to spend the last ten days of Ramadan at the Dominican priory in Cairo. On both parts, Yaḥyā (guest) and Anawati (host) gave a theological account of practices of welcome and hospitality toward the religious other. See Morelon, «Osman Yaḥyā (1919 - 1997)», *MIDEO* 24 (2000): 441 - 447.

<sup>143</sup> Méricoux, «Un mystique dominicain ...», *Sources*, 2. Also Pérenneès, *Georges Anawati*, 129; de Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 25.

<sup>144</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 12; see also Méricoux, «Un mystique dominicain ...», *Sources*, 3.

<sup>145</sup> Paul Nwyia, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh al-Iskandarī (m. 709/1309) et la naissance de la confrérie shadhilite* (Beyrouth: Dār al-Machreq, 1972).

<sup>146</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 25.

<sup>147</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 25; Avon, *Les frères*, 726. According to Avon, Massignon’s enthusiasm is partially based on an error. He is confusing Anṣārī and his father A. Maṣṣūr who was a student of Sharīf Ḥamza ‘Aqīlī in Balkh where one of the last disciples of al-Ḥallāj lived. Avon cites de Beaurecueil «c’était tentant d’établir inconsciemment une filiation entre Anṣārī et Ḥallāj.» (Lettre de Serge de Beaurecueil, Paris, Mai 2003).

De Beaucueil engaged his studies with such zeal and discipline that he would overcome his prior lack of knowledge in Islamic mysticism very rapidly. In addition, the environment of Cairo and the IDEO coupled with the expertise of his early teachers were decisive. He concentrated on the life and work of Anṣārī. But the master wrote in Arabic and Persian. Hence, he had to learn Persian. Fortunately, fate was on his side. A year after his arrival, Cyprian Rice (d. 1966),<sup>148</sup> an English Dominican, arrived at the IDEO. He was an excellent Persian scholar and became de Beaucueil's teacher. Pérennès writes,

*En 1947, un dominicain anglais, Cyprian Rice (1889-1966), rejoint la communauté du Caire. Plus âgé que les autres, c'est un iranisant, et à ce titre, un atout pour la maison. Il a fait d'excellentes études universitaires à Cambridge et maîtrise l'arabe, le persan et le turc. Nommé au Caire sans avoir été consulté et plus intéressé par l'Iran, il ne sera pas à l'aise dans une maison francophone ouverte sur le monde arabe et demandera à partir au bout de trois ans. Non sans avoir beaucoup apporté à l'équipe naissante en langue persane et en mystique : c'est lui qui apprendra le persan à Serge de Beaucueil.*<sup>149</sup>

De Beaucueil underwent years of training to acquire the tools for research, namely, fluency in the needed Islamic languages and techniques of editing of ancient manuscripts.

## 2 Studios Years

De Beaucueil stayed in Cairo for seventeen years and his entire goal was to edit, translate and comment on Anṣārī's work. While at the IDEO, de Beaucueil worked intensively and learned Persian with such ease that even Anawati would pay him a tribute. However, he faced two additional hurdles; on the one hand there was a lack of interest in Islamic mysticism by Cairo's Muslim intellectual circles, and on the other, he had to learn how to edit ancient manuscripts. Under the tutelage of Pierre Nautin (d. 1997),<sup>150</sup> he learned

<sup>148</sup> Anthony Mohony, "Cyprian Rice," *MD*, 15 (2001): 217 - 225.

<sup>149</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 129 - 130.

<sup>150</sup> Pierre Nautin (d. 1997) was director of the École Pratique des Hautes Études and well known for his erudite scholarship in patristic literature, particularly, on Origen. Nautin stayed at the IDEO while working on the manuscripts of Didymus the Blind (d. c. 398), the great Alexandrian theologian of the early church.



the techniques of editing ancient manuscripts and spent hours on this painstaking work. He also befriended Yaḥyā al-Khachab, professor of Persian at Cairo's University, who was interested in Persian Sūfism. Avon remarks:

*Tout est à faire, la mystique n'intéresse guère les intellectuels du Caire, à l'exception peut être de Yahia al-Khachab, professeur de persan à l'Université. Beaurecueil édite, traduit et commente. L'un des pensionnaires de la Maison dominicaine du Caire, Pierre Nautin, patrologue venu en Egypte pour étudier les textes de Didyme l'Aveugle (. . .), lui apporte une aide précieuse en lui inculquant les principes de l'édition de textes (recherche des familles de manuscrits...). Ses conseils permettront à Beaurecueil «de démêler l'enchevêtrement de la tradition manuscrite des Étapes des Itinérants de Khwādja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī»<sup>151</sup> et de donner des éditions réputées excellentes.<sup>152</sup>*

These years of hard work and commitment to Islamic mystical dimensions were not a smooth ride. As Avon notes correctly «*La mise en route est laborieuse.*»<sup>153</sup> From 1946 to 1950 de Beaurecueil experienced some frustration with the tedious scientific research of Sūfī texts. At times, he neglected his scholarly work and dedicated much of his energy and time to pastoral work. In a letter to friar Avril, he explained his disappointment. He writes:

*Pas spécialement attaché ici par mon travail orientaliste: je travaille aussi coupé de l'Egypte que si j'étais à Paris ou à Pékin . . . car personne ou presque ne s'intéresse à la mystique musulmane autrement que comme à une antiquité plus ou moins bizarre, à moins de tomber dans les aberrations de la sous mystique des confréries populaires.<sup>154</sup>*

Hence, during this period of lack of interest in research, he held the position of chaplain at the Christian Brothers' high school located in the popular quarter of Khurunfish, where he celebrated the liturgy in the Coptic rite. He also devoted part of his time to Catholic boy scouts of Wadi al-Nil located in the same vicinity, and for while worked with inner city Cairo factory workers. He wore the Tarbush and mingled with Egyptians in coffee shops

<sup>151</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Introduction à 'Conseils d'un ami pour un cours de méthodologie,'» *MIDEO* 7 (1963): 241.

<sup>152</sup> Avon, *Les frères*, 727.

<sup>153</sup> Avon, *Les frères*, 728.

<sup>154</sup> Avon, *Les frères*, 728. (Lettre de Serge de Beaurecueil au Père Avril, 20 juin 1950, K (012), *APF*.)

and restaurants where he perfected his ‘*āmiyya*. He was, in the words of Pérennès, “*Un personnage, chaleureux mais atypique.*”<sup>155</sup> His personality did not facilitate a smooth relationship with Anawati and Jomier, or the rest of the friars. On the one hand, these years of pastoral ministry prepared him for his days in Kabul, and on the other the unease relationship with his brothers would play a role in his departure from Cairo.

In meantime, like many other friars at the IDEO de Beaurecueil joined with Anawati and Jomier in building relationships with Egyptian intellectuals, religious and secular scholars alike. In their search for partners for dialogue and conversation, Anawati was the key figure. De Beaurecueil lived through the ups and downs of IDEO. He took an active part in *Le Circle Thomiste* and ‘*l’Association des frères sincères, (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā)*’ and the famous meetings entitled *Les Mardis de Dār al-Salām*.<sup>156</sup> He delivered papers on Anṣārī at these meetings. The lectures at these gatherings were geared toward philosophical, theological, and spiritual discussions, previously initiated by Massignon and Mary Kahil (d. 1979).<sup>157</sup> It was a unique experience where Christians, Catholic and Orthodox, and Muslims, and secular intellectual met to discuss societal and religious issues and comparative religions and spiritualities. It was as Pérennès put it «*l’invention d’un espace pour le dialogue avec les musulmans.*»<sup>158</sup> The friars befriended many Egyptian scholars, Taha Hussein, Youssef Karam, Mahmoud al-Khodeiry, Yaḥyā al-Khachab,

<sup>155</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 129.

<sup>156</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati* «Le Cercle thomiste et l’Association des frères sincères (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*), » 155 – 60; «Mary Kahil et la *badaliyya*, » 161 – 66; and finally, «*Les Mardis de dār es-Salām*, des années bénies, » 166 – 71. Also, Avon, *Les frères*, «*Ikhwān es-Ṣafā*» 555 - 559, «*Dār es-Salām*» 559 – 568; and a comprehensive study of «*La badaliyya*, » Massignon, *L’Hospitalité sacrée*, 371 – 469.

<sup>157</sup> Mary Kahil was a remarkable and influential woman. She was born into a rich Greek Catholic family and was a close friend of Massignon and befriended the friars. Avon speaks tenderly of the tandem Kahil and Massignon as «l’amazone et l’érudit» *Les frères*, 124. Pérennès writes, «*C’était une grande dame, assez représentative de ces familles grecques- catholiques, qui, tout en étant pétrées de culture arabe, savaient rester ouvertes à l’Occident. Georges Anawati et les dominicains d’Abbassiah lui devront beaucoup.*» Mary Kahil et la *badaliyya*. Also, Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 161. Jacques Keryell writes an abridged biography of the aristocratic woman in Massignon, *L’Hospitalité sacrée*, 77 – 132.

<sup>158</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 149.

Naguib Mahfouz, and many more. Also, Anawati reached out to the scholars of al-Azhar and crafted a working relationship between the IDEO and the most famous Sunni University in the world.

This chapter frames the formative years of de Beaurecueil as a Dominican friar, and an Orientalist completely devoted to the life and work of Anṣārī. De Beaurecueil's path to Kabul and visit to Herāt will follow naturally. The scope of this chapter depended on selective historical data and literature relevant to the friars' involvement with the Muslim and Arab world. This chapter is primarily an attempt to locate de Beaurecueil in the Dominican tradition and at large and the French province in particular. Even though this dissertation is primarily about the life and work of de Beaurecueil, it is absolutely crucial to outline the biography and bibliography of Anṣārī in order to fully understand the master's influence on his pupil. The dynamic and dialectic relationship between de Beaurecueil's scholarly work and his burgeoning spiritual discipleship with his master demand a solid historical account of the master's eventful life. The next chapter fulfills this duty.

## ***Chapter II Heeding Anṣārī's Call***

I was born on Friday at dusk, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the month of sha'bān in the year 396 H/. I am 'vernal,' for I was born in the spring. I love spring very much. The Sun was in the seventeenth degree of Taurus when I was born, and every time it reaches that point again I complete another year. It is the middle of spring, the season of flower and herbs.<sup>159</sup>

*Celui qui T'a connu, de soi qu'a-t-il à faire ?  
De famille et d'enfants, de bien aimée, qu'a-t-il à faire?  
Tu le rends fou, et Tu lui offres les deux mondes.  
Le fou de Toi, des deux mondes, qu'a-t-il à faire?*<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Victor Danner and Wheeler Thackston, *Ibn 'Aṭā' Illāh: The Book of Wisdom; Abdullāh Anṣārī: Intimate Conversations*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 168. See also de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 24.

<sup>160</sup> *Munājāt*, trans. de Beaurecueil, 26.

Since de Beaurecueil's fateful conversation with Osman Yaḥyā in the library of the IDEO in 1946, he dedicated his entire scholarship to mystical Islam, and particularly to the life and work of Anṣārī. Yaḥyā, Chenu, and Massignon supported de Beaurecueil's enthusiasm, while the IDEO provided the necessary environment to launch a study that would last a lifetime. In addition, his choice of Anṣārī goes deeper than those circumstantial events. The challenges of the task and the very personality of Anṣārī persuaded de Beaurecueil. Indeed, at the outset, the study of the Pīr of Herāt was riddled with difficulties and hurdles. There was very little scholarly research in western languages. Likewise in Arabic, resources on the master were disappointing and sparse. While Anṣārī was popular and revered in the Persian world, to a certain extent, he was neglected in the Arab scholarship. In addition, manuscripts of works attributed to the Pīr of Herāt were in dire need of edition. (De Beaurecueil would particularly distinguish himself in this matter.) Also, the disdain for mystical Islam in Cairo's intellectual circles of the time, and the problematic spectacle of popular Ṣūfism or what Yaḥyā Michot terms "spiritual diabetes," added insult to injury. Above all, Anṣārī's Ḥanbalism in theology or his stanch attachment to orthodoxy, in this case the literal meaning of the Qur'ān and the Sunna, afforded his teaching respectability and reliability in the eyes of de Beaurecueil. Avon remarks:

*... l'attachement à la figure même d'Anṣārī, l'aide à s'engager dans ce travail. Bien que mystique, la fidélité d'Anṣārī au Coran et à la Tradition, ainsi qu'à l'école d'Ibn Ḥanbal apparaît comme une garantie de stricte orthodoxie de sa doctrine spirituelle, il ne s'estime jamais dispensé d'observer rigoureusement les préceptes de la Loi divine.<sup>161</sup>*

The master's mystical Ḥanbalism sparked in the Dominican friar reasons to dig further into his life and work. Gardet and Anawati in their classical book on Islamic theology believe

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<sup>161</sup> Avon, *Les frères*, 728 - 9.

that for Anṣārī, mysticism is a path of deepening one's understanding of the Qur'ān and the Sunna.<sup>162</sup>

De Beaurecueil's journey could be called an inner mystical and hermeneutical dialogue between his life and Anṣārī's work. De Beaurecueil's desire to deepen his understanding of the Pīr of Herāt would lead surely to a visit in Afghanistan. This adamant will to visit the land of his master and its people is reminiscent of Chenu's advice to the student brothers at Le Saulchoir in 1937. De Beaurecueil remembers Chenu's intelligent intuition and lucidity: «*N'étudiez pas les doctrines, mais les hommes qui les ont conçues, dans leur milieu, dans leur temps. Sans cela vous risquez de n'y rien comprendre.*»<sup>163</sup> Chenu, the medievalist, knew first hand the crucial necessity of understanding the historical, geographical, and socio-political background of doctrines and those who constructed them. Heeding the call of Anṣārī, de Beaurecueil journeyed to the land of his master and consequently decided to live in Kabul for twenty years. It is important to remark that de Beaurecueil's scholarly 'obsession' for the Pīr of Herāt and desire to go to Afghanistan were also fueled by, first, his childhood's longing to travel away from all that traditional Catholic France had to offer; second, after 17 years in Cairo, he was ready to move on to a different land and meet different people. He yearned to have first hand experience with Persian speaking Muslims. Finally, his relationship with Anawati, Jomier, Boilot and the rest of the IDEO's community was not always ideal.<sup>164</sup> Those friars had very different personalities and community life was dreadful at times. De Beaurecueil's departure to Kabul and the possibility of spending the rest of his life there were driven by many complex personal and professional reasons. The move would mean a complete

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<sup>162</sup> Louis Gardet et Georges Anawati, *Introduction à la théologie Musulmane*, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1948), 91 - 93.

<sup>163</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 24.

<sup>164</sup> Avon, *Les frères*, 446 – 45 and 625 - 630; Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 125 - 137.

latitude in his choice of ministry, or how to organize his religious life within the parameters of the Order. Above all, away from any religious and ecclesial structure in Kabul, and without any regular conventual life, he will be on his own. It would be up to him to decide the kind of Dominican scholar of Islam that most fits his personality and vision of life, away from institutional constraints like the IDEO and hierarchical hurdles from the Vatican watch dogs and the Dominican order. He would break away from the institutional framework and as the later chapters will show, he will fully exercise his prophetic call and follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

This chapter attempts to answer two key questions: why would de Beaurecueil feel such impetus to travel so far to Kabul and Herāt, and, who was Anṣārī to command such love and dedication on the part of a French Dominican friar who lived nine centuries after the master's death? In answering those questions, our analysis seeks to anchor Anṣārī's biography to the entire study. Unlike many biographies, this inquiry does not pretend to offer more than a rough sketch of Anṣārī's life curve, but even a sketch can sometimes be of service. It can at least open up new perspectives. This endeavor is an effort to locate, geographically and historically, the life and work of the Pīr of Herāt. The heart of the matter is to present socio-political and religious events that shaped his life. Spiritually, the Pīr of Herāt's Ḥanbalīsm and his fateful meeting with Abū 'l-Ḥasan Kharāqānī in 1033, when he was twenty-seven years old, are significant in the master's life. In addition, attention is drawn to a time line of some key events that occurred during Anṣārī's life. Finally, Anṣārī's own troubles: incarceration, life under suspicion and persecution, and his unyielding and at times belligerent personality are important features in crafting an accurate portrait of the master's life. This historical journey also sheds light on the spiritual and intellectual connection between de Beaurecueil and his 'patron saint.' It is a glimpse into

events, and circumstances, which would mesmerize de Beaurecueil and lead him on a unique path in the field of mystical Islam. In the first section, attention is given to de Beaurecueil's path to Kabul and the second and third sections introduces the eventful life of the Pīr of Herāt in the political and theological settings of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Khurāsān.

## ***I The Road to Kabul***

### **1 The voyage**

From 1946 onward, de Beaurecueil worked tirelessly to become one of the very best scholars on Anṣārī. In his own words, he describes the task:

*Quel travail! A l'aide des sources arabes et persanes, qu'il fallait dépister, je devais reconstituer la vie d'un homme, le situer dans son époque et dans son milieu, suivre l'évolution de son expérience et de sa pensée, dégager son message original. D'autre part, il me fallait éditer, étudier, traduire au besoin ses œuvres, en suivre l'interprétation et l'influence à travers ses commentateurs. Le travail s'annonçait austère et passionnant, comme un puzzle! Bien que vivant au Caire, j'étais chaque jour, par la pensée, et des heures durant, à Hérāt.<sup>165</sup>*

A visit to Anṣārī's shrine in Herāt and the opportunity to uncover unknown manuscripts on works attributed to the master remained but a dream even though he highly wished for it. In 1954, however, the road to Afghanistan became reality when Evariste Levy-Provençal (d. 1956),<sup>166</sup> one of the foremost scholars of Islamic Spain and a member of the CNRS, came to Cairo for his annual lecture series at the University of Guizeh. Invited for dinner at the Dominican priory, Levy-Provençal inquired about de Beaurecueil's work. G. Anawati replied: «*Toujours plongé dans son Anṣārī jusqu'au cou. Il aimerait bien pouvoir aller un jour à Herāt, voir les lieux où il a vécu et s'il n'y a pas là-bas des manuscrits de ses œuvres*

<sup>165</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 30.

<sup>166</sup> See a few books by Evariste Levy-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane au Xe siècle* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2002 (reprint); *Séville musulmane au début du XIIe siècle* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2001), (reprint)



*qu'on ignore.»*<sup>167</sup> Levy-Provençal's answer could not had been more delightful to de Beaurecueil's ears: *«Mais c'est facile! Qu'il fasse une demande à la commission du CNRS dont je fais partie, je lui garantis l'obtention d'une bourse pour un voyage d'étude en Afghanistan.»*<sup>168</sup>

Furthermore, by 1954, a number of Afghani scholars and intellectuals were familiar with de Beaurecueil's expertise on Anṣārī and very much interested in his possible visit to Afghanistan. A case in point is 'Abd al- Ghafūr Ravān Farhādī.<sup>169</sup> A short diversion is necessary here. In the summer of 1952 while in Paris, de Beaurecueil paid a visit to Massignon to update him on his work. Unexpectedly, Farhādī, a student at the Sorbonne, rang the bell when de Beaurecueil and Massignon were at the door step. De Beaurecueil recalls, *«Les présentations furent vite faites. Dès le lendemain, il déjeûnait au couvent. Ce fut le début d'une amitié qui dure encore, malgré les vicissitudes du temps.»*<sup>170</sup> They became friends for life. After Provençal's visit, de Beaurecueil started preparation for a journey to a country which would become his promised land. Besides Farhādī, Salāhuddīn Saljūqī, the ambassador of Afghanistan to Egypt, was acquainted with de Beaurecueil personally and as a scholar. In addition, he was very much pleased by the Dominican's erudition because Herāt, the birth place of Anṣārī, was also Saljūqī's home town. Hence, de Beaurecueil could rely on solid high level connections, Farhādī and Saljūqī, and a promise of scholarship from the CNRS. Nonetheless, a flight to Kabul in 1954 was by no mean

<sup>167</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 31.

<sup>168</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 31.

<sup>169</sup> Farhādī had a successful career. He was professor of law at the University of Kabul at the time of de Beaurecueil's first visit. In addition, he wrote a short English introduction to Anṣārī's life and translated de Beaurecueil seminal biography of the master into Persian under the title: *Sarguzāsh-t-i Pir-i Hirāt :Khvāja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī*. (Kabul: Beyhaqi, 1355/1976).

<sup>170</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 30 - 31.

guaranteed. After a year of negotiations, he was granted a visa and the scholarship came through. Before he departed, Saljūqī had words of advice for de Beaurecueil. He said:

*Je suis fort heureux que vous alliez à Kaboul. Vous connaîtrez notre pays, ses splendeurs et ses misères, autant que vous pourrez les voir. Mais il y a ce que vous ne verrez pas, et dont personne ne vous parlera, et qu'il faut cependant que vous sachiez pour comprendre ... Vous vous tairez, mais vous saurez!*<sup>171</sup>

Indeed, at the beginning of September 1955, de Beaurecueil embarked on his first scholarly trip to Kabul. Accurately, Avon notes, «Grâce à une bourse accordée par le CNRS, il entreprend une mission scientifique en Afghanistan, en Iran, au Pakistan, et en Inde (septembre 1955 – janvier 1956). »<sup>172</sup> His journey to Afghanistan was quite eventful and took about three months. First, there was a long ship ride from Cairo to Colombo which he describes in these terms:

*Ce fut les affres de la mer Rouge sous le plein été, avec cette chaleur d'enfer qui s'unit à l'humidité pour faire de vous un loque; puis, à la sortie, la convergence des courants qui, deux jours durant, allie le tangage au roulis et vous donne l'envie de rendre l'âme.*<sup>173</sup>

Then, they traveled along the beautiful coast of Ceylan to arrive in India (his childhood dream country). He had the opportunity to visit Hindu shrines and a few monasteries, and meditate on the shores of the holy Ganges river. Finally, he arrived in Kabul on October 11, 1955, where his friend Farhādī welcomed him at the airport. He gives us a panoramic view of the land of Anṣārī:

*Devant moi, contrastant avec les couleurs de l'Inde, s'ouvrait un paysage de pastel. Un ciel d'azur inondait de lumière des montagnes, de quoi vous couper le souffle, et Kaboul, qui n'était alors qu'un gros village, se confondait de loin avec le sol. Je trouvai d'un coup la ville de mes rêves, le pays d'Anṣārī, mon pays.*<sup>174</sup>

Then, he offers his first impression of the capital-city:

<sup>171</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 32. (emphasis by de Beaurecueil himself.)

<sup>172</sup> Avon, *Les frères*, 730.

<sup>173</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 32.

<sup>174</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 33.

*Décrire Kaboul est impossible. Il faut l'avoir vu. Imaginez un cirque de hautes montagnes avec, dans la cuvette, à 1800 mètres d'altitude, une multitude de maisons basses, à terrasse, couleur de terre, blotties sur les pentes de deux collines. Des restes de murailles, d'avant l'Islam, cernent la vieille ville. Une rivière presque à sec l'été, grondante au printemps, y serpente.*<sup>175</sup>

Love at the first sight? Not exactly; de Beaurecueil had fallen in love with the land of his master long before he set foot in the country. Mérigoux observes: «*Petit à petit s'ouvrirent devant lui toutes les portes scientifiques et universitaires de ce pays où il atterrit pour la première fois le 11 octobre 1955, pour une brève visite, mais ce fut alors pour lui des 'fiançailles.'*»<sup>176</sup>

## 2 In the Land of Anṣārī

Once in Kabul, de Beaurecueil realized the technical and logistical difficulties of collecting manuscripts. Manuscripts were scattered all over the city, in different libraries and often enough, in private collections. He decided to take the bull by the horns and to classify the available manuscripts. At the end he writes, «*Ainsi travaillai-je d'arrache pied jusqu'à la fin de décembre.*»<sup>177</sup> Avon describes the goal of de Beaurecueil's first journey to Kabul and the enthusiastic response of Afghan authorities:

*L'objectif principal du Dominicain est de photographier des manuscrits importants concernant Anṣārī et son œuvre. Le gouvernement Afghan encourage vivement la mission en lui accordant toutes les facilités pour son voyage et ses recherches dans diverses bibliothèques (musée de Hérāt, département de la presse Afghane, ministère de l'instruction publique et bibliothèques privées en tête desquelles vient celle du roi Zāher Shāh) en lui ménageant, au cours des rencontres officielles, des contacts avec les savants dont Farhādī, professeur à la faculté de droit qui trouve quelques étudiants pour aider bénévolement son travail. Salāhuddīn al-Munajjed, directeur de l'Institut des manuscrits arabes lui demande de mettre à profit ce travail pour ouvrir un second volet de sa mission, à savoir établir un catalogue succinct de tous*

<sup>175</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 34.

<sup>176</sup> Mérigoux, "Un mystique dominicain..." *Sources*, 286 - 95.

<sup>177</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 36.

*les manuscrits en arabe qu'il aura l'occasion de trouver, et photographier les plus importants.*<sup>178</sup>

From October to December 1956, de Beaurecueil spent his time fishing for manuscripts and recording them systematically.<sup>179</sup> However, one of the main goals of his long and tiresome voyage remained unfilled; he had not visited Herāt and prayed at Anṣārī's tomb. He remarks, «*Pourtant, avant de quitter l'Afghanistan me restait l'essentiel: mon voyage et ma visite au tombeau d'Anṣārī.*»<sup>180</sup> Thanks to Farhādī, on January 1st, 1956 they embarked on a trip to Herāt. The four hundred kilometers journey from Kabul to Herāt separated by the Hindukush turned out to be an odyssey. They flew from Kabul to Kandahār then took a car to complete the trip. The road expedition from Kandahār to Herāt took another four days. Finally, they arrived in Herāt on January 6th, 1956. He recalls his arrival in Herāt :

*C'est le 6 janvier au matin, jour de l'Épiphanie, que je découvris Hérat, par un beau soleil et un froid piquant. C'était tout autre chose que Kaboul: des avenues bordées de conifères, de la verdure, un horizon plus large, des toits formés de petites coupoles juxtaposées, de vieux pans de murailles, une majestueuse citadelle se découpant sur le ciel bleu, des pigeons gris.*<sup>181</sup>

He seems satisfied, «*J'étais arrivé au port et profondément ému.*»<sup>182</sup> and he adds:

*Puis commença la visite de la ville, de ses tombeaux d'hommes célèbres, de ses monuments, dont on pouvait encore imaginer l'ancienne splendeur. Au petit musée m'attendaient un certain nombre de manuscrits, dont je pus établir les fiches pour mon catalogue. On semblait prêt à m'ouvrir toutes les portes, l'accueil était somptueux, surtout du responsable de Gāzorgāh qui fut un sommet.*<sup>183</sup>

<sup>178</sup> Avon, *Les frères*, 730. De Beaurecueil did not need the Afghani government to have direct access to R. Farhādī. They have known each other since 1952, when they met at L. Massignon's apartment in Paris.

<sup>179</sup> De Beaurecueil published the fruit of this systematic and demanding work upon his return in 1956.

«*Manuscrits d'Afghanistan*,» *MIDEO* 3 (1956): 75 - 206. Avon gives us a details account:

*A son retour, il [de Beaurecueil] donne une liste succincte de manuscrits arabes dans le numéro 2 de la Revue de l'Institut des manuscrits arabes (novembre 1955). Il réserve au MIDEO la première ébauche de ses fiches descriptives pour plus de 550 manuscrits en arabe, persan, pashto, ourdou et turc (cote de manuscrits, titre et auteur, dimensions, nombre de folios et nombre de lignes par page, date et nom du scribe, papier et écriture, ornementation, état, reliure, et, dans le cas des manuscrits arabes, référence éventuelle à Brockelmann).* *Les frères*, 730.

<sup>180</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 37.

<sup>181</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 38.

<sup>182</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 39.

<sup>183</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 39.

And he concluded his first visit with an intimate conversation with his patron saint:

*Je pris des photographies et surtout j'eus un tête-à-tête avec mon vieux maître. Près de la stèle de marbre blanc, je récitai le Notre Père et la Fātiha, première sourate du Coran. Puis je m'adressai au Pīr-é-Hērāt: 'Je suis au rendez-vous. Veux tu que je demeure, dans ton pays pour toujours? Je suis prêt. A toi d'arranger les choses! Je retourne en Egypte, mais tu sais que mon cœur reste ici.'*<sup>184</sup>

De Beaurecueil's memorable journey to Kabul and Herāt was essential to his work and by and large successful. On his way back to Cairo, he visited Iran and Iraq. However, the chance of a second visit remained dreadfully grim. Afghanistan was not a tourist hub. He conceded, «*Ces fiançailles avec l'Afghanistan semblaient apparemment sans lendemain.*»<sup>185</sup>

However, Providence would decide otherwise. In 1962, on the 900<sup>th</sup> lunar anniversary of Anṣārī death, the Afghan government invited de Beaurecueil, in gratitude for his work and expertise, to come to Kabul for a national celebration. He recalls the surprising news:

*Et puis, un jour, en 1962, alors que j'avais abandonné la partie, je fus convoqué à l'ambassade d'Afghanistan: on avait pour moi «de bonnes nouvelles. Pour le neuvième centenaire lunaire de la mort d'Anṣārī, un séminaire allait se tenir à Kaboul, auquel le gouvernement voulait donner un caractère international. J'étais invité, et le billet d'avion m'était offert. Je repartis.*<sup>186</sup>

After the festivities, de Beaurecueil seized the opportunity to collect more manuscripts. It was during this second trip that the possibility of living in Kabul took a serious turn. This time, the invitation came from his host Dr. Anas, the incoming minister of Education. In a conversation with de Beaurecueil, Dr Anas asked: «*Vous êtes bien ici? Alors, ne vous pressez pas! Mais, au fond, pourquoi ne viendrez vous pas vivre et travailler à Kaboul?*

*Depuis votre premier voyage, les choses ont bien changé.*»<sup>187</sup> After a short negotiation

<sup>184</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 39.

<sup>185</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 40.

<sup>186</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 40.

<sup>187</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 44.

between the Province of France and the Afghan authorities, de Beaurecueil's dream came true.<sup>188</sup> Dr. Anas took the Dominican to meet the dean of the department of literature at the University of Kabul, Dr Bahāuddīn Majrūh, who spoke perfect French. The university decided to hire de Beaurecueil to teach the history of Islamic mysticism and the technique of the edition of manuscripts, starting the following school year, March 1963.<sup>189</sup> He concludes, «*Je retournerai au Caire pour un dernier hiver. J'avais cru y passer toute ma vie, alors que dix-sept ans n'étaient qu'une étape, riche en préparations d'une autre aventure, celle-ci imprévisible. J'avais quarante cinq ans, le bel âge pour m'y lancer.*»<sup>190</sup> According to Méricoux, the first trip was *les fiançailles* and the second one *les épousailles*.<sup>191</sup> The narrative of de Beaurecueil's path to Afghanistan offers a background to the question: who was Anṣārī to command and elicit such passion in him?

## ***II An Age of Tribulations***

The celebrated Ḥanbalīte Ṣūfī 'Abdullāh Abū Ismā'īl al-Anṣārī Ibn Muḥammad Abū Maṣṣūr was born in Herāt on May 4, 1006. Most of Anṣārī's biographers rely on the following major sources: al-Dhahabī's (d. 1348) *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, (The biographies of the Great and Prominent People); Ibn Rajab al-Baghdādī's (d. 1393) *Dhayl 'alā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila* (Appendices to the Generations of Ḥanbalītes); and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's (d. 1492) *Nafahāt al-Uns* (The Breezes of Intimacy).<sup>192</sup> According to Mojaddedi:

<sup>188</sup> See Dominique-Jacques Boilot's letter to the French Provincial on behalf of de Beaurecueil «*Des conditions très exceptionnelles se trouvent réalisées qui permettent un témoignage d'une rare qualité dans un pays où le christianisme n'est représenté que par quelques étrangers non implantés.* » (lettre du 27 octobre, 1962, AIDEO)

<sup>189</sup> De Beaurecueil recalls his joy «*Le troisième dimanche de l'Avent, je signais un contrat .... moi j'avais envie de danser.*» in *Mes enfants*, 44.

<sup>190</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 44.

<sup>191</sup> Méricoux, "Un mystique Dominicain," *Source*, 287.

<sup>192</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 15 - 17; 'Abd al- Ghafūr Ravān Farhādī, 'Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt, (Richmond: Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996) 3. Nahid Angha in her dissertation mentions other Persian contemporary sources dealing with the master's biography, such as Qāsim Anṣārī's translation of *Ṣad maydān*; Mullā'i's *Majmu'a-yi*, in Angha, *An Annotated Translation and Examination of the Essential Mystical Teachings in 'Abdullāh*

The earliest biography of Anṣārī is found in Muḥammad b. Abī Ya‘lā’s (d. 1133) *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*. Ibn Abī Ya‘lā introduces Anṣārī, in his brief ( 15 lines) biography, as the leader of the Sunnites (*ahl al-sunna*) in Herāt, who is known by the title Shaykh al-Islam, and is called Khaṭīb al-‘ajam (the orator of the Persian), on account of the depth of his knowledge, his eloquence and his eminence.<sup>193</sup>

For all practical purposes, this section relies primarily on de Beaurecueil’s biography of the master which is translated in Persian by Farhādī and remains a reference for most scholars.

Anṣārī lived in a totally Persian-speaking milieu of Herāt and Khurāsān, but books attributed to him are both in Persian (his mother tongue) and in Arabic (the *lingua franca* of the empire).<sup>194</sup> Anṣārī’s life under both the Ghaznavid and the Saljūq dynasties was intellectually fertile and yet tumultuous. The Ghaznavids conquered and ruled Khurāsān from 999 to 1040 and Afghanistan until 1187.<sup>195</sup> The Saljūqs defeated the Ghaznavids by 1041 and became the new rulers of Khurāsān.

## 1 Political and theological Milieu

### 1-1 The Ghaznavids and the Saljūqs<sup>196</sup>

Theoretically, the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty ran from 750 to the sack of Baghdād by the Mongols in 1258. The caliphate was only tenuously held together through the loyalty of local governors and military commanders to the Caliphs. One of the most brilliant eras of

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Anṣārī’s (396 – 481/1006 - 1089) *Ṣad maydān (The Hundred Fields)* unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Exeter, December, 2006, 12.

<sup>193</sup> Jawid A Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Ṣūfism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from Sulamī to Jāmī*. (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 200), 69; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 15.

<sup>194</sup> The Pīr of Herāt’s most famous Persian book is the *Munājāt*, and the *Manāzil al-sā’irīn* is his revered Arabic book.

<sup>195</sup> The two full scale books devoted to the Ghaznavids are: Edmund Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963), and *The Later Ghaznavids: Splendor and Decay*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984). See also his articles “Early Sources” *The IQ*, 3 - 22, where he catalogs the major literary and historical sources for the reigns of Sebūktigin, Maḥmūd, Muḥammad and Mas‘ūd (977 - 1041). Also, Spuler, *EI* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1050 - 53

<sup>196</sup> Edmund Bosworth “Barbarian incursions,” in *The Medieval History of Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia*, (London: Varorium, 1977), 1 - 16. The author compares the entry of Turkish descend tribes into Islam to the entry of northern European barbarians tribes into Christianity, 400 - 800 C.E.

Islamic civilization occurred under the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate. Along with such success came social, political and religious unrest and upheaval. Most historians consider that the central authority in Baghdād lost control of virtually all of its provinces except the region around Baghdād by 937.<sup>197</sup> Mahamoud Ayoub goes even further and remarks:

Within half a century of ‘Abbāsīd rule, the state began to show clear signs of disintegration. State defense and administration were gradually taken over by foreign army generals and state ministers (the viziers), reducing the caliph to a mere figurehead with little or no authority.<sup>198</sup>

Notwithstanding the collapse of their central power, the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs managed to maintain some religious power and the warlords had the temporal one. The decline of the central power in Baghdād fostered on one hand “provincial autonomy and disintegration,”<sup>199</sup> and on the other, a division of the empire into two linguistic and cultural regions: Arabic and Persian. Persian became the predominant literary language in the eastern lands of Khurāsān and Transoxania. The foreign warlords were largely Turkish soldiers who were hired to defend the caliph, Baghdād and to protect the borders of the dynasty. According to Ira M. Lapidus:

With the breakup of the ‘Abbāsīd empire it is no longer possible to recount Middle Eastern history from a central point of view. The chaotic history of the period that follows is best understood by distinguishing the eastern parts of the Middle East, including Transoxania, Iran, and Iraq, from the western parts, consisting primarily of Syria and Egypt.<sup>200</sup>

The collapse of the military and financial powers of the central government in Baghdād and the expansion of Islam into largely Turkish and other non-Arab areas led to the emergence

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<sup>197</sup> Ayoub, *Islam, Faith and History*, (London: Oneworld, 2005), 87; Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, Vol. 2, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 12; also, *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 1, ed., W. B. Fisher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 112 - 120; Umberto Scerrato, *Islam: Monuments of Civilization* (New York: Grosset and Danlap, 1976), 40. The author writes, “The Caliphate was soon to be fragmented into a complex and unstable number of entities.”

<sup>198</sup> Ayoub, *Islam*, 87.

<sup>199</sup> Lapidus, *A History*, 106 - 111.

<sup>200</sup> Lapidus, *A History*, 112.



of powerful local dynasties. Indeed, during the “Shī’ī century,”<sup>201</sup> the Būyids were in charge in Baghdād from 932 - 1062; the Fāṭimids, ruled over a large portion of Islamic provinces with capital in Cairo from 909 to 1171,<sup>202</sup> and the Ḥamdānids dominated northern Syria with capital in Aleppo from 905 to 1004. Other rivals to the ‘Abbāsids, the Sāmānids ruled over eastern Persia (Khurāsān and the Transoxania) from 819 to 1005, and extended their power as far as Rayy and Kirmān.<sup>203</sup> The Sāmānids were gradually defeated by the Ghaznavids, who reigned for two hundred years. Ghazna was their capital but in the later period, they were confined in the Pandjāb, and Lahore became the center of their power.<sup>204</sup>

The Ghaznavids started their reign while the Būyids were in power in Baghdād. They attacked Transoxania and western Iran, plundered Lahore in 1030, and occupied parts of northern India. The Ghaznavid Sultans considered India to be their milk-cow, an inexhaustible sources of treasures and slaves.<sup>205</sup> Hodgson introduces the Ghaznavids in these terms: “A political structure temporarily more brilliant than even the Sāmānid was built in the Afghān mountains on the far eastern rim of the Iranian highlands.”<sup>206</sup> Indeed, the Ghaznavids took advantage of the decline of the Sāmānids’<sup>207</sup> power in the Transoxania and built their dynasty.<sup>208</sup> In 960, the Sāmānid dynasty was torn apart between its military families, one of which was headed by the Turkish general Alptigin (d. 975), a slave governor.<sup>209</sup> After the death of the Sāmānid Emir, Abū al-Ḥasan in 961, Alptigin’s son in law, Abū Manṣūr Sebūktigin (d. 977), established himself as the provincial governor of

<sup>201</sup> Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 36.

<sup>202</sup> The city of Cairo was founded and established as the capital in 969.

<sup>203</sup> Lapidus, *A History*, 141 - 2.

<sup>204</sup> Hodgson, *The Venture*, vol. 2, 32 - 39; Lapidus, *A History*, 112 - 20.

<sup>205</sup> Bosworth, “The Imperial Policies,” and “Turco-Mongol” in *The Medieval*, 49 - 82 and 237 - 40.

<sup>206</sup> Hodgson, *The Venture*, 39.

<sup>207</sup> The Sāmānids were a Persian dynasty which ruled Transoxania and the Khurāsān from 810 to 1005. See “Sāmānids” in *E. I.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vol. 2, 1025 - 42

<sup>208</sup> Bosworth. *The Ghaznavids*, The book is a well-documented and detailed study of the Ghaznavid dynasty between 994 and 1040.

<sup>209</sup> Lapidus, *A History*, 114.

Ghazna where he ruled as an independent sovereign, thus starting the Ghaznavid dynasty.<sup>210</sup>

During their dominion, they replaced the established elites with slave soldiers, started a policy of supporting Muslim religious leaders and declared allegiance to the central government in Baghdād. They supported Islamic education and the Persian literary revival.<sup>211</sup>

At Sebūktigin's death, Maḥmūd al-Ghaznawī (d. 1030) succeeded him. He consolidated and expanded his territorial power eastward to the Indian borders. He ruled Khurāsān and extended his power to western Iran, defeated the Būyids in Rayy and persecuted the Shī'īs there. His victorious military campaigns and attachment to Sunni orthodoxy pleased many Muslims.<sup>212</sup> Anṣārī was just twelve when Mas'ūd (d. 1041), the elder son of Maḥmūd al-Ghazna, was proclaimed governor, after the death of his father in 1030.<sup>213</sup> The great Maḥmūd of Ghaznawī and his son Mas'ūd left a lasting impression on the folk-consciousness and in the popular romance and epics as both patrons of art and poetry and "the hammer of the infidels."<sup>214</sup> According to Hodgson, "Ghazna became under Maḥmūd the center of the revival of Iranian traditions, and the memory of Sāsānids glories. It was to Maḥmūd's court that Firdawsī brought the *Shāh Nāmāh*, an epic recounting the story of the olden monarchs of Iran."<sup>215</sup> However, Mas'ūd tried to maintain his father's dominion but ran into serious difficulties against Saljūq warlords. About a decade later and after the long disastrous Battle of Dandānqān in 1040,<sup>216</sup> Mas'ūd abandoned Khurāsān altogether. The effective ruling power of the Ghaznavid state weakened drastically with the

<sup>210</sup> Hodgson, *The venture*, 32 - 58.

<sup>211</sup> Lapidus, *A History*, 116; Bosworth, "The Imperial Policy" in *The Medieval*, 49 - 82.

<sup>212</sup> Hodgson, *The venture*, 32 - 52. See also, Muḥammad Habib, *Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznin* (Aligarh:Cosmopolitan Publishers, 1951) on the history of the Ghaznavid.

<sup>213</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 54.

<sup>214</sup> Bosworth, *The Medieval*, 2 and 85 - 92.

<sup>215</sup> Hodgson, *The Venture*, Vol. 2, 41; Bosworth, *The Medieval*, 33 - 44.

<sup>216</sup> See "The Battle of Dandānqān," in *E Br*.

assassination of Mas‘ūd but did not collapse completely. Mawdūd (Mas‘ūd’s son and heir) tried vigorously to resist the Saljūq warlords, but he lost a decisive battle against Alp Arslān in 1043.<sup>217</sup> Still, B. Spuler asserts that Ghaznavid’s power, centered on Ghazna, lingered until 1187.<sup>218</sup> The Ghaznavids lost their grip of power when Oghuz peoples, under the leadership of a Saljūq family, crossed the Oxus River in 1025, conquered Nīshāpūr in 1037 and defeated the Ghaznavids in 1040. They started the Saljūq<sup>219</sup> empire and became the new rulers of Khurāsān.<sup>220</sup>

Hodgson remarks, “Upon the collapse of the Sāmānid authority in Khurāsān, after 999, the Ghaznavī had not proved able, on the basis of Turkic slave-soldier corps, even with the aid of Indian booty, to restore effectively the Sāmānid Empire.”<sup>221</sup> In fact, by the year 1059, Anṣārī was fifty-three and Alp Arslān, the Saljūq General, held the central power in the ‘Abbāsīd dynasty. The Saljūqs’ takeover was the result of sustained raids of the Central Asian people on the ‘Abbāsīd territories. In 1038, the Saljūq warlord Ṭoghrīl-beg (d. 1063) defeated the Ghaznavids and elevated himself to the title of Sultan of Nīshāpūr. But the most significant historical event happened in 1055 when Tughrīl Beg triumphantly entered Baghdād. The Caliph al-Qā’im opened the gates of Baghdād to the Saljūq general in order to free himself from the Būyids’ grip. Tughrīl Beg, once he secured the title of Sultan, allied himself with Sunni orthodoxy against sectarian Shī’ī groups.<sup>222</sup>

<sup>217</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khawādja*, 87.

<sup>218</sup> “Ghaznavids,” *E.I.* 2<sup>nd</sup>

<sup>219</sup> Bosworth believes that the coming of the Turkish tribes into Islamdom was a watershed event comparable to the coming of the northern Germanic tribes (Barbarians) to Christendom. See “Barbarian Incursion” *The Medieval*, 1 - 16.

<sup>220</sup> Lapidus, *A History*, 117.

<sup>221</sup> Hodgson, *The Venture*, 42.

<sup>222</sup> Hamid Dabashi, “Persian Šūfism during the Saljūq Period,” in *The Heritage of Šūfism* ed., Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 136. Also, see Hodgson, *The Venture*, Vol. 2, 32 - 42, under the title “The Persian provincial successor states.”

Lapidus remarks that “thus the Saljūqs reunited most of the former ‘Abbāsīd empire and rekindled the dream of Muslim unity and universal empire.”<sup>223</sup>

## 2 Religious Upheaval

The Saljūq warlords’ dream to unify the entire Muslim empire collided against the lack of organizational and institutional capacities needed to sustain a vast territory. Also, their nomadic heritage was detrimental to their ambitions and undermined imperial unity. For example, “the Saljūqs had no fixed idea about legitimate succession, and considered the right to rule to be vested on the leading family as a whole.”<sup>224</sup> Moreover, many theological, philosophical, mystical, and juridical schools were at each other’s throats. The Sunni-Shi’ite hostility extended the sectarian divisions of early Islam. These sectarian hostilities, aggravated by the continued presence of proto-Kharijite sentiments, were further extended into theological debates centered on the Mu‘tazilī – Ash‘arī controversies on a number of issues such as the essence and attributes of God, the created or uncreated nature of the Qur’ān. Also, theological differences were turned into juridical and jurisprudential disputes among various Sunni madhhabs (Ḥanafī, Malikī, Shāfi‘ī, and Ḥanbalī). The mystics joined in the debates and these disputes were not merely a question of suspicion of reason, or simple scholarly debates. Unfortunately, physical harassment and imprisonment, bodily injuries and outright executions, murder of opponents and book-burnings were their common manifestation.<sup>225</sup> Finally, to make matters worse, the separation of power and authority between the Caliphs and the Sultans was uncertain. As long as the Saljūq sultans were effective rulers, the Caliphs had limited political power. Whenever the Sultans’

<sup>223</sup> Lapidus, *A History*, 117.

<sup>224</sup> Lapidus, *A History*, 119.

<sup>225</sup> Dabashi, “Persian Sūfism during the Saljūq Period,” in *The Heritage*, ed., Lewisohn, 141.

political power diminished, the Caliphs attempted to assert their political authority in Baghdād and its surrounding areas.

The successful consolidation of Islamic sciences around various philosophical, theological, and juridical trends opened the gates to competing orthodoxies and social unrest. Similarly, the systematization and canonization of various mystical paths sparked hostilities among representatives of various Ṣūfī *ṭuruq*. The most notable philosophical and theological quarrels were the opposition of Ḥanbalī's literalism against Ash'arī and Mu'tazilī rationalism. Comparably to their predecessors, the Saljūq warlords exploited division and hostility among various groups for their own political advantage. Nevertheless, the most fascinating aspect of this period was the collusion between political power and influential mystical figures. Many well known Ṣūfī Shaykh functioned under state patronage and traded their *baraka* and *Karāma* for political, economic and financial favor from the Sultans and viziers.<sup>226</sup> Omid Safi's book is an excellent investigation of the collusion between religion and politic under the Saljūqs. He writes, "Among various Ṣūfīs who are fully appropriated by the Saljūq legitimizing discourse are the mysterious and perhaps illiterate Bābā Ṭāhir 'Uryān, the exuberant Abū Sa'īd-i Abī 'l-Khayr, and the repentant and austere Aḥmad-i Jām."<sup>227</sup> The author argues that Saljūq rulers championed the Sunni orthodoxy and normative view of Islam in order to legitimize their power.<sup>228</sup> Their zeal for orthodoxy was a cover up to create a lasting political presence. Their notion of religious orthodoxy was constructed by endowing *madrāsas* (like the Niẓāmiyyas) and Ṣūfīs logdes (*khānqāhs*) and many Ṣūfī Shaykh, Saints, and distinguished scholars lived

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<sup>226</sup> Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) See chapter five: "Bargaining with Barāka," 125 - 157.

<sup>227</sup> Safi, *The Politics*, 131.

<sup>228</sup> Safi, *The Politics*, xxiv.

under the patronage of the Saljūq sultans and viziers. On the one hand, Saljūqs linked political loyalty to orthodoxy and normative religious practices, and on the other, confused disloyalty to the rulers with heresy or unorthodox practices.

Therefore, one could argue that during their reign, the Saljūqs acted as an effective catalyst to reactivate the latent elements of hostility among the competing discourses of Islamic sciences concerning orthodoxy and legitimacy. Anṣārī was educated and grew up in such an environment. Dabashi described the milieu as follows:

The nomocentricity of Islamic law and dogma, or primacy of principle and action, and the logocentricity of philosophy, or the primacy of reason and knowledge, came into direct and active opposition to the contranarrative of Ṣūfism, or the primacy of being in love. The political force, the relentless will-to-power, continued to act as the crucial catalyst in reengaging these forces against each other.<sup>229</sup>

Nonetheless, the Saljūq warlords' need to foster a political and religious orthodoxy ran into the oppositional discourse of many mystical figures. Omid Safi contrasts "the shifting politics of al-Ghazali"<sup>230</sup> to "an oppositional Ṣūfī: 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī"<sup>231</sup> to show how opposition to Saljūqs' political ideology led in the former case to a prominent intellectual position, and in latter to case excruciating death. Some Ṣūfīs who dared oppose the Saljūqs paid the price. Anṣārī suffered exile, imprisonment, and persecution and 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī was brutally executed in 1131 for heresy. Safi notes:

While some Ṣūfīs (and more importantly their descendants) such as Abū Sa 'īd -i Abī 'l-Khayr and Aḥmad-i Jām aligned themselves with the Saljūqs, others resisted lending their *baraka* to legitimizing the Saljūqs. Some of the 'outsiders' were neither Shāfī'ī nor Ḥanafī but Ḥanbalīs, like Khwāja 'Abd Allāh Anṣārī. He was a pious soul who remained a perpetual outsider to the Saljūq regime and was regularly harassed. We are told that due to his critique of the Ash'arī theologians, Anṣārī was threatened with death on five separate occasions and was exile three times.<sup>232</sup>

<sup>229</sup> Dabashi, "Persian Ṣūfism during the Saljūq Period," *The Heritage*, ed., Lewisohn, 139.

<sup>230</sup> Safi, *The Politics*, 105 - 124.

<sup>231</sup> Safi, *The Politics*, 158 - 208.

<sup>232</sup> Safi, *The Politics*, 158. The author refers to de Beaurecueil's biography of the master as his source.

Anṣārī's radical dogmatism and his adamant defense of Ḥanbalism did not go unnoticed. His literal reading of the Qur'ān and the Sunna and above all his repulsion of rationalism were almost legendary in Persian Ṣūfism. Like many Ḥanbalī, he was accused of anthropomorphism and ridiculed by rationalist theologians. Qāsim Ghanī filed this unflattering report:

Khwāja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī was devoid of the liberalism and freedom of intellect expected of the Ṣūfī masters. He considered the path of attaining truth as subservient to obedience to the artificial aspects of Ḥanbalīte School. In enjoining the good and prohibiting the evil, in harassing the mystics and Ṣūfis, and even in accusing of corruption and blasphemy those mystics who fell short of performing their religious rites according to the Ḥanbalīte mandates, he surpassed all legal and religious authorities.<sup>233</sup>

Dabashi takes the matter further and writes, "Khwāja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī is the most radical example of nomocentric reaction to mystical ecstasy. In his *Manāzil al-sā'irīn*, he becomes more Ḥanbalīte than Iman Ibn Ḥanbal himself in defending the cause of a radical literalism in the routine observance of rituals."<sup>234</sup>

Anṣārī was a Ṣūfī of a very different kind, though comparable in importance to Ṣūfī giants in the Khurāsān region, such as Abū Sa'īd-i Abū'l Khayr (d. 1049),<sup>235</sup> Abū'l Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 1072),<sup>236</sup> and 'Alī ibn 'Uthmān al-Ḥujwīrī (d. 1073), to name but three.<sup>237</sup> First, he shared with Ḥujwīrī the honor of having composed one of the first Ṣūfī treatises in the Persian language.<sup>238</sup> Second, unlike the theologian Ṣūfī al-Qushayrī, Anṣārī

<sup>233</sup> Qāsim Ghanī, translated by Dabashi, "Persian Ṣūfism during the Saljūq Period," in *The Heritage*, ed., Lewisohn, 141.

<sup>234</sup> Dabashi, "Persian Ṣūfism during the Saljūq Period," in *The Heritage*, ed., Lewisohn, 143.

<sup>235</sup> Frietz Meier, "Abū Sa'īd-i Abū'l Khayr," *E.I.* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 377 - 80; Terry Graham "Abū Sa'īd-i Abū'l Khayr," in *The Heritage*, ed., Lewisohn, 83 - 136.

<sup>236</sup> See the translation of his seminal book: *Principles of Ṣūfism*, trans. B. R. von Schlegell (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1992); *Al-Qushayrī's Epistle*, trans. Alexander Knysh, (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2007); See Qushayrī in Richard Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 150 - 53; Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam*. (London: Routledge, 2006), 71 - 2; Knysh, *E.Q.*, no. 5, 143 - 46.

<sup>237</sup> *Kashf al maḥjūb*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Accord, NY: Pir Publications, 1999); Bowering, *E.I.* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 429.-30.

<sup>238</sup> The Persian treatises are *Kashf al- maḥjūb* by Ḥujwīrī, and *Munājāt* by Anṣārī.

was not a theologian, nor a philosopher, nor a jurist, nor a writer but a master-teacher (a Roshi in Zen tradition). He taught the mystical way, and his oratory skills mesmerized his audience. Third, Anṣārī and Abū Saʿīd-i Abū'l Khayr were important figures of the formative period of Ṣūfism and central to the development of organized Ṣūfism. However, they represented two distinct models of leadership. Abū Saʿīd was perhaps the most colorful and famous of Khurāsān Ṣūfīs. He studied law, theology and other religious sciences before adopting an ascetic life under the tutelage of Abū'l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Qaṣṣāb al-Amulī.<sup>239</sup> Abū Saʿīd is one of the key figures in the earliest evolution of successful Ṣūfī Orders and centers.<sup>240</sup> Anṣārī's personal and professional fortunes changed as the religious and political pendulums swung in different directions. He was a committed polemicist, a celebrated Ṣūfī master and a staunch Ḥanbalī. Unfortunately, a confusion of genres and a reductionist reading of the mystical dimensions of Islam have led to some artificial and historically problematic conclusions. Such is the case with the abundant literature on a supposed enmity between Ḥanbalism and Ṣūfism. A short divergence at this point would clarify the matter.

## ***2-1 An Alleged Hostility***

Ḥanbalism is a *madhhab*, a theology and a spirituality. H. Laoust writes:

“Ḥanbalism denotes the followers of the school of theology, law and morality which grew up from the teaching of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855) whose principal works, the *Musnād* and *responsa* (*masā'il*) had began to be codified even during the lifetime of the author.”<sup>241</sup>

According to Nimrod Hurvitz, “the Ḥanbalīs were not merely a group of lawyers whose

<sup>239</sup> Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Ṣūfism: The Formative Period*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 123.

<sup>240</sup> Karamustafa, *Ṣūfism*, 122 - 124.

<sup>241</sup> Henri Laoust, “Ḥanābila” *EI* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 158 - 62.



sole preoccupation was legal doctrine, but rather members of a social movement that maintained distinct moral and theological positions.”<sup>242</sup> In general, Ḥanbalīs are very suspicious of any rationalist hermeneutics, speculative theology (*kalām*) and attempts to temper with the letter of the religious sources. They uphold the absolute omnipotence, and inscrutability of the unfathomable divine being, who could only be known and understood insofar as God has chosen to reveal Himself through the Qur’ān and his Prophet. Ḥanbalīs reject allegorical interpretation or rational speculation upon the sacred texts.<sup>243</sup> Anṣārī fits squarely among prominent Ḥanbalī Ṣūfīs<sup>244</sup> but he was a Ḥanbalī in theology and spirituality, not in *madhhab*. Among early Ḥanbalī Ṣūfīs or traditionists who influenced Anṣārī there were: Abū’l-‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Qaṣṣāb Amulī, Abū Manṣūr Ma’mar (d. 1027) and Muḥammad ibn Faḍl al-Ṭāqī Sijistānī (d. c.1025). These masters “believe that the true meaning of God’s unity could be attained only after the divine law (*sharī’a*) was realized through a scrupulous implementation. The correct application of the law, however, was not possible without an understanding of its inner meaning.”<sup>245</sup> Other few prominent Ḥanbalī Ṣūfīs were: Ibn ‘Aqīl ibn Aḥmad al-Baghdādī (d. 1119)<sup>246</sup> about whom Makdisi even speaks of Ḥallājism,<sup>247</sup> ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166),<sup>248</sup> Muwaffaq al-dīn Ibn

<sup>242</sup> Nirmod Hurvitz, *The Formation of Ḥanbalism* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 73. Also, Wael Hallaq’s review of the book in *JIS* 15: 3 (2004): 345 - 47.

<sup>243</sup> Lapidus, *A History*, 166.

<sup>244</sup> The term ‘traditionist’ is preferred in contradistinction of modern traditonalist school of Guénon and Schuon. Ṣūfī traditonist of the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> as well as the 11<sup>th</sup> century persistent concern was to draw the boundaries of normative or legitimate Ṣūfism. The work of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 996), *Qūt al-qulūb* (*The Sustainance of Hearts*) served such purpose. Anṣārī cultivated the traditionist orientation of Makkī, Abū Nu’aym, and Abū Manṣūr Ma’mar and shared with them a Ḥanbalī allegiance. In the eyes of those traditionists, Ṣūfism was entirely mainstream and defined the very core of traditionism (e.i faithfulness to the Qur’ān and the Sunna) and in complete harmony with orthodox Islam. See a partial translation of *The Sustainance of Hearts in Knowledge of God*, trans. John. Renard (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 112 - 263.

<sup>245</sup> Karamustafa, *Ṣūfism*, 9.

<sup>246</sup> Makdisi, “The Ḥanbalī school and Ṣūfism,” *Humaniora Islamica* 2 (1974): 61 – 74.

<sup>247</sup> Makdisi, “Ibn Qudama’s,” *Gibb Memorial New Series* XX, 1970. Also Makdisi “Nouveaux détails sur l’affaire d’Ibn ‘Aqīl,” *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, (Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1956), 91 - 126.

<sup>248</sup> ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Revelation of the Unseen*, trans. Muhtar Holland (Oakland Park, FL: al-Baz Publishing, 1992).

Qudāma (d. 1223),<sup>249</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350), and Ibn Rajab al-Baghdādī (d. 1393).<sup>250</sup> Many scholars raise questions about Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), who is mentioned in the chain of initiation of the Qādirī *ṭarīqa*.<sup>251</sup>

To be certain, Ḥanbalīs have written polemical literature and many of them spearheaded the most lethal opposition to Ṣūfī confreries.<sup>252</sup> The anti-Ṣūfism image attributed to Ḥanbalism is captured by Makdisi, “The Ḥanbalīs, who are variously regarded as conservative to the core, rigid, intransigent, even fanatical, fought tooth and nail, we are told, in opposing Ṣūfism’s admission into the ranks of the orthodox.”<sup>253</sup> In addition, Makdisi believes that Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Talbīs Iblīs* (*The Devil’s Delusion*) “is perhaps the most important single factor in keeping alive the notion of Ḥanbalī hostility to Ṣūfism.”<sup>254</sup> Other scholars of Islam such as Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921) have contributed largely to this problem.<sup>255</sup> He described Ḥanbalism as a fanatical school of jurisprudence opposed to any progressive principles. He portrayed the school in terms of its inflexible

<sup>249</sup> Makdisi, “L’Isnad initiatique,” in *L’Herne: Louis Massignon*, ed., Jean François Six, no. 13, (Paris: L’Herne, 1970), 88 - 96.

<sup>250</sup> Makdisi, *Religion*, 122.

<sup>251</sup> Thomas Michel, *Ibn Taymiyya: A Muslim Theologian’s Response to Christianity*, (Ann Arbor: Caravan Books, 2009), 25. Michot also alludes to the possibility that Ibn Taymiyya was a Qādirī Ṣūfī. He writes, “Nevertheless, rather than being an unconditional opponent to Ṣūfism, he (Ibn Taymiyya) used to show great respect for the early spiritual masters of Islam, was quite probably himself a Qādirī, and composed commentaries on various Ṣūfī texts.” in *Ṣūfism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 123. Makdisi clears all doubt and asserts “Ibn Taīmīya: A Ṣūfī of the Qādiriya Order,” *Religion*, 118. See also, ‘Abd al-Ḥākīm I. Al-Maṭrūdī, *The Ḥanbalī School of Law and Ibn Taymiyya* (London: Routledge, 2010) and *Ibn Taymiyya and his Time*, ed., Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Aḥmed, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>252</sup> Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Ṣūfīs and Anti-Ṣūfīs* (London: Routledge, 2003); *Islamic Mysticism Contested*. ed. Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999). Also, there are other forms of opposition to Ṣūfism such as secularist movements in the Muslim world, some sections of Shī’ah Islam, and others anti-Ṣūfī groups.

<sup>253</sup> Makdisi, “Ḥanbalī School and Ṣūfism,” in *Humaniora Islamica*, 2, 61.

<sup>254</sup> Makdisi “The Ḥanbalī School and Ṣūfism”, in *Humaniora Islamica*, 2, 69. Even in this case, Ibn al-Jawzī did not direct his attacks against Ṣūfism per se but against certain Ṣūfī practices deemed incompatible with the Qur’ān and the Sunna of the Prophet. In the book, Jawzī extends his stern criticism to many other groups: philosophers, theologians, traditionists, jurists, preachers, philologists, poets, common people, and the rich. He hardly left alone any group.

<sup>255</sup> Ignaz Goldziher. *Le dogme et la loi de l’Islam*. trad. Felix Arin, (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1920), 144 - 145

opposition to rationalism, and reason, and criticized its literal interpretation of the Qur'ān and the Sunna. Finally, Goldziher attributed the success of Ḥanbalīsm to the hero-martyr aura of Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), the eponym of the school, on the one side, and to the writings of Ibn Taymiyya and his most celebrated disciple Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya on the other.<sup>256</sup> If Goldziher and the like dub Ḥanbalīs as anthropomorphists because of their literalist reading of the scriptures, the Ḥanbalīs, on the contrary, see themselves as protectors of the heritage of the prophet and the *salaf* (pious ancestors) against all external and internal foes. They claim to preserve the Muslim community's agreement on the primacy of the Qur'ān and the Sunna.

## **2-2 Dissimilar Approach**

Esther Peskes, in her article “The Wahhābiyya and Ṣūfism in the Eighteen Century,” shows that historically the relationship between Wahhābism and Ṣūfism is much more complex and nuanced than is seen generally. She remarks, “Historical research on the internal development of Wahhābism is still in its beginnings, and our knowledge of Wahhābi literature remains rather superficial. For this reason sweeping statements concerning the absolute incompatibility of Wahhābism and Ṣūfism should be avoided.”<sup>257</sup> In Peskes' investigation of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb's actual teachings against Ṣūfism, the author notes that modern scholars have often exaggerated the claim that Wahhābism is a kind of neo-Ḥanbalīsm that draws on Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and the like.<sup>258</sup> Religious movements are not monolithic entities or blocks of stone. They are made of individuals and sub-schools of thought within a larger framework. Scholars of a given

<sup>256</sup> Goldziher. *Le dogme*, 145.

<sup>257</sup> Esther Peskes. “The Wahhābiyya and Ṣūfism in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century,” *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, ed. F. de Jong and Bernd Radtke, 145.

<sup>258</sup> Peskes, “The Wahhābiyya ...,” *Islamic*, ed. F. de Jong and B. Radtke, 148.

movement do not always agree, and difference of opinions within theological and juridical schools is maybe the best-shared legacy. Ḥanbalīs did not produce a monolithic phenomenon and their views of Ṣūfism varied widely from one period to another. It is unfortunate that the great figures of Ḥanbalīsm who respected Ṣūfism seem no longer deserving of recognition by mainstream media, popular and scholarly publications. Makdisi sums up the argument “As far as the Ḥanbalīte movement is concerned, our greatest need at the present is to rid ourselves of nineteenth-century views which still continue to encumber our general survey of works on Islam.”<sup>259</sup>

Unlike Goldziher but in agreement with Peskes, Makdisi sees the alleged hostility of Ḥanbalīsm against Ṣūfism as a biased reading of history.<sup>260</sup> He notes that Ḥanbalīsm and Ṣūfism arose from a thoroughly Qur’ānic milieu and shared an affiliation to *ahl al-Sunna*. “Ḥanbalī Ṣūfism” Makdisi writes, “is consistent with Massignon’s theory of the Qur’ānic origin of Ṣūfism.”<sup>261</sup> Upon these shared grounds Ṣūfism and Ḥanbalīsm evolved in the same direction. Makdisi asserts a close relationship between the two and not outright antagonism.<sup>262</sup> He adds:

In reality, there exists a very strong kinship between Ḥanbalīsm and Ṣūfism. This kinship can be seen not only in their common spiritual origin, namely the meditation on the Koran; it can also be seen in the common membership in one of Islam’s earliest religious movements. Both the Ḥanbalīs and the Ṣūfīs were members of Ahl al-Ḥadīth, i.e. the Traditionalists, as opposed to the Rationalists, not merely the traditions experts. This kinship explains their common, active, and unremitting hostility to Kalām, or rationalist theology. Moreover, both Ṣūfīs and Ḥanbalīs go beyond the formalism of works.<sup>263</sup>

<sup>259</sup> Makdisi, “Ḥanbalīte Islam,” in *Studies on Islam*, ed. and trans. Merlin L. Swartz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 242.

<sup>260</sup> Also the following authors share a similar view: Henri Laoust, “Le Ḥanbalīisme sous les mamlouks baḥrides,” in *REL*, 35; Marijan Molé, *Les Mystiques Musulmans* (Paris: PUF, 1965), 35 - 36.

<sup>261</sup> Maskidi “The School of Ḥanbalīsm and Ṣūfism,” *Humaniora*, 65.

<sup>262</sup> Makdisi “Ḥanbalīsm and Islam,” *Studies*, ed. M. Swartz, 216 - 264.

<sup>263</sup> Makdisi, *Religion Law and Learning in Classical Islam*, (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1991), 120.

Schimmel is in total agreement with Makdisi, “The traditional idea that Ḥanbalīte rigorism and mystical emotion are mutually exclusive can no longer be maintained –not only was Anṣārī an energetic representative of this school, but ‘Abdu’l Qādir Gilānī (d. 1166), the founder of the most widespread mystical fraternity, also belonged to this madhhab.”<sup>264</sup> In final analysis, history witnesses to the fact that stern Ḥanbalīsm did not deter mystics and had showed no inherent incompatibility between the mystical dimensions of Islam and Ḥanbalīsm. Perhaps the spirituality of strict adherence to the literal reading of the Qur’ān and the Sunna enabled many Ḥanbalīte Ṣūfīs to reach a deeper understanding of the divine path. At this point, let us return to the settings of Anṣārī’s life curve.

### ***III Anṣārī: A Controversial Shaykh***

#### **1 The first 27 years (1006 - 1033)**

##### ***1-1 In Herāt***

Herāt was for Anṣārī what Florence was for Dante and Paris was for de Beaurecueil. De Beaurecueil translates Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazwīnī’s tribute to Herāt:

*Si quelqu’un te demande: des villes quelle est la plus belle?  
Et si tu veux lui répondre, dis lui Hérāt!  
Ce monde est comme la mer et le Khorāsān comme l’huître;  
au milieu de cette huître,  
la ville de Hérāt est comme une perle.*<sup>265</sup>

Farhādī reports the following: “He [Anṣārī] said ‘I was born in the Old Citadel (Kohan-dezh). I have grown up there, [and] no other place has been dearer to me.’”<sup>266</sup> Among the major cities of medieval Khurāsān such as Balkh, Marv, and Nīshāpūr, only Herāt still

<sup>264</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 89.

<sup>265</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khawādja*, 23. From Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī Qazwīnī, *Nuzhat al-qulūb*, ed. Guy Le Strange (Leiden: Brill, 1915), 152.

<sup>266</sup> Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 6; de Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 11.

remains a major modern provincial city. Substantial architectural and historical sites convey a sense of continuity with a glorious past, such as Anṣārī's shrine and tomb, the city old Fort, Timurid period famous Friday Mosque, and Goharshād's tomb, wife of the Timurid emperor Shāhrukh Mīrzā (d. 1447). Herāt is in the area which has been the site of cities since the time of Alexander the Great,<sup>267</sup> but with the advent of Islam it became important following the Arabs' conquest in the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Later, the city was incorporated into successively the Sāmānid, the Ghaznavid, the Saljūq, and the Ghūrid territories. "The Pearl of Khurāsān," as the city was known, owes its existence to Harī Rūd which takes its sources in the mountains of Ghūr and eventually vanishes in the sands of the Karakum desert.<sup>268</sup> The city is located at a principal road junction and towers over 3000 feet above sea level. Herāt was one of the centers of the vast province of the Khurāsān. According to Jürgen Paul, scholarly works on the city's history before the Timurid period in the 15<sup>th</sup> century are few and far between. The author believes that the city was never the center of an empire but retained the status of a provincial center.<sup>269</sup> Paul concludes that "... the city was to achieve imperial grandeur only in the post-Mongol period, as the center of a regional state first under the *mulūk* Kart in the fourteenth, and later on, as the brilliant center of Timurid imperial culture in the fifteenth century."<sup>270</sup> Nonetheless, Herāt played a prominent role in pre-modern Islamic civilization and was an important site of learning, second only to Nīshāpūr in cultural and scholarly achievements.<sup>271</sup> The great polymath and erudite Qur'ān commentator Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī died in Herāt in 1209. It is tempting to speak of Herāt in biblical terms. O you, Herāt! You are by no means the least among the

<sup>267</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn 'Aṭā' illāh*, 168.

<sup>268</sup> See "Herāt" *EI*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 177 – 78; de Beaurecueil, *Khawādja*, 19 - 20.

<sup>269</sup> Jürgen Paul, "The Histories of Herāt," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 33, no.1/2, (2000): 98 - 99.

<sup>270</sup> Paul, "The Histories of Herāt" *Iranian Studies*, 104.

<sup>271</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn 'Aṭā' illāh*, 168.

old provinces of the Khurāsān, since from you shall come an erudite and staunch Ḥanbalīte poet and Ṣūfī, who would honor your long legacy of being a fertile soil for mystically inclined souls. Indeed, prophesy was fulfilled in 1070 when the ‘Abbāsīd Caliph al-Qā’im (d. 1075) invested Anṣārī with a robe of honor and the title ‘*Shaykh al-Islam*’.<sup>272</sup> Farhādī reports that the decree further mentioned the titles of *Shaykh al-Shuyūkh*, *Zayn al-‘Ulamā* (Ornament of the Scholars) and *Nāṣir al-Sunna* (Supporter of the Prophetic Tradition).<sup>273</sup> Likewise, in 1082, the Caliph al-Muqtadī (d. 1094) repeated his predecessor’s gesture and sent a sumptuous robe of honor to him. Anṣārī was and still is the Pīr of Herāt, or the Pīr -e ṭarīqat. He is par excellence “the spiritual master of Herāt”<sup>274</sup> and his shrine is still very popular.<sup>275</sup>

The Pīr of Herāt is descended from the *Anṣār* (helpers) and his genealogy traces him back to the people of Yathrib, who welcomed and helped the Prophet of Islam after his hijra in 622. According to tradition,<sup>276</sup> his ancestor Abū Ayyūb took charge of the Prophet’s journey and was known among the Anṣār as the “companion in charge of the camel saddle” (*sāhib al-raḥl*). It is believed that Abū Ayyūb’s son, Abū Manṣūr al-Anṣārī, had settled in Herāt with the conquering armies of Islam in the 7th century during the Caliphate of ‘Uthmān (d. 656).<sup>277</sup> Farhādī proposes the following genealogy:

‘Abdullāh Abū Ismā‘īl Anṣārī, son of  
Muḥammad Abū Manṣūr Anṣārī, son of  
‘Alī Abū Ma’ad Anṣārī, son of  
Aḥmad Anṣārī, son of  
‘Alī Anṣārī, son of  
Ja‘far Anṣārī, son of

<sup>272</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 170.

<sup>273</sup> Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 4.

<sup>274</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khawādja*, 19.

<sup>275</sup> See Appendix for Anṣārī’s shrine in Herāt.

<sup>276</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, “childhood,” 25 - 29; “Youth and Education” 29 - 20; “Teachers” 30 - 35; de Beaurecueil, *Khawādja*, 23; Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 4 - 5.

<sup>277</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical*, 89, De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 15; Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 4.

Manṣūr Anṣārī, son of  
 Abū Manṣūr Anṣārī, son of  
 Abū Ayyūb Khālīd ibn Zayd al-Khazrajī al-Najjārī al-Azdī.<sup>278</sup>

Schimmel, de Beaurecueil and Farhādī agree that Anṣārī's father Muḥammad Abū Manṣūr (d. 1039), who was a shopkeeper in Herāt at the time of Anṣārī's birth, had been a mystic himself in his youth in Balkh.<sup>279</sup> Thackston confirms that “ ‘Abdullāh inherited a tendency toward Ṣūfism, the ‘inner’ or spiritual aspect of Islam, from his father, Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad, who had been trained in the way of abstinence and renunciation of worldly affairs by an ascetic in Balkh.”<sup>280</sup> Abū Manṣūr was first a disciple of the ascetic Ṣūfī Shaykh Abū 'l Muẓaffar Ḥabbāl al-Tirmidhī. This master schooled Anṣārī's father in the rigorous art of spiritual discipline, and exercises, and in scrupulous observation of dietary laws.<sup>281</sup> Later, Abū Manṣūr joined the Ṣūfī circle of Sharīf Ḥamza 'Aqīlī of Termez (d. 1060)<sup>282</sup>, who was revered for his spiritual blessings or divine graces (*baraka*) and supernatural powers (*karāma*). He had a circle of renowned Ṣūfīs with him, among whom were 'Abd'l-Qāsim Hannāna, 'Ārif 'Ayyār and 'Abd'l-Malik Iskāf, one of the few surviving disciples of al-Ḥallāj (d. 922).<sup>283</sup> Although Abū Manṣūr returned to Herāt and started a family, he remained a dedicated Ṣūfī and associated with Ṣūfī masters in the city. Married life, however, never took root in him. One day, while Anṣārī was still young, his father abandoned his shop, wife, and family to return to his mystical life in Balkh. Hence, he left Anṣārī and his siblings in a dire socio-economic predicament. Most of Anṣārī's biographers speculate about the time of his father's departure. De Beaurecueil believes that

<sup>278</sup> Farhādī, *'Abdullāh*, 4.

<sup>279</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical*, 89; De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*. 26

<sup>280</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn 'Aṭā' illāh*, 168.

<sup>281</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 12.

<sup>282</sup> See his biography in Anṣārī's Persian *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*, translated by Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 54.

<sup>283</sup> Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, 176 - 77; De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 25 - 26. Jāmī nor de Beaurecueil indicates the date of the death of these Ṣūfī masters and I could not find them either.



his father left while Anṣārī was around ten years old. He writes, *«L'événement se situerait au mieux, croyons-nous, vers l'année 406 H., alors que l'enfant avait une dizaine d'années.»*<sup>284</sup> Others suggest that Anṣārī was almost fourteen when his father left Herāt for good.<sup>285</sup> In spite of this short-lived marital life, de Beaurecueil asserts, *«Abū Manṣūr aura donné à son fils l'exemple d'une vie austère, le goût de la science et un sens profond des choses de Dieu.»*<sup>286</sup> Anṣārī's childhood was neither idyllic nor comfortable but blessed with key teachers and mentors who instilled in the young man a love for learning and an enthusiasm for memorization that would determine the course of his life.

Before Anṣārī's father deserted his family to return to ascetic Ṣūfī life in Balkh, he had enrolled his son in school very early. He made sure that the youngster had proper and sound religious education and good knowledge of Arabic and Persian. In the words of de Beaurecueil, Anṣārī revered his father because he was pious and righteous, scrupulous on matters of ritual practices, strictly observant of sharī'ah, a Ṣūfī, and a daily reader and reciter of the Qur'ān. He was the man who guided his first steps towards an accomplished religious and mystical life.<sup>287</sup> Farhādī and de Beaurecueil note that by the age of four Anṣārī had started learning to read the Qur'ān under a teacher guardianship. Both biographers remark that his first teacher was a woman.<sup>288</sup> Soon, however, he was removed and put under the tutelage of another teacher. In his own words, Anṣārī tells the history of his early education:

*On me mit tout d'abord à l'école d'une femme, puis on se dit que cela pouvait me causer dommage. A l'âge de quatre ans, on me mit donc à l'école de Mālīnī. Lorsque j'eus neuf ans, j'écrivis sous la dictée de cadi Abū Manṣūr et de Jārūdī. A quatorze ans, ils me firent prendre place dans leur assemblée. Tout jeune, je suivis*

<sup>284</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khawādja*, 35. De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 12.

<sup>285</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 6; Schimmel, *Mystical*, 89; Karamustafa, *Ṣūfism*, 95.

<sup>286</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Anṣārī, Chemin de Dieu*, (Paris: Sindbad, 1988), 27.

<sup>287</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khawādja*, 27.

<sup>288</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 8; De Beaurecueil, *Khawādja*, 29.

*les cours à l'école d'un lettré; j'y fus si habile à composer des vers que les autres élèves en virent à me jalouser.*<sup>289</sup>

When it came to ḥadīth instruction, Anṣārī's father made a deliberate choice to entrust his son to two esteemed traditionists, qādī Abū Manṣūr Azdī (d. 1019) and the remarkable ḥāfiẓ Jārūdī (d. 1023). The former was an eminent jurist and a staunch traditionist. He was the chief shāfi'ite qādī of Herāt. Notwithstanding his advanced age, he stood aggressively against rationalist theologians and earned the title "a sharp sword against the innovators."<sup>290</sup> This temperament of qādī Abū Manṣūr Azdī would later match Anṣārī's own belligerent character against his opponents. Until qādī Abū Manṣūr Azdī's death in 1019, Anṣārī took lessons from both Shaykhs. Jārūdī took the youngster under his tutelage for ḥadīth lessons. Unlike qādī Abū Manṣūr Azdī, Jārūdī was not confrontational but a man endowed with an unusual gift of memorization. He was respected for his detachment from earthly goods, and very scrupulous in avoiding illicit or prohibited things.<sup>291</sup> After the death of qādī Abū Manṣūr Azdī, Jārūdī took complete charge of Anṣārī's education. Jārūdī was so impressed by his disciple's intelligence and hard work that he chose Anṣārī to succeed him after his death. From qādī Abū Manṣūr Azdī, Anṣārī inherited an aggressive zeal against the 'innovators' and from Jārūdī he acquired a methodology of Qur'ānic commentary and the art of ḥadīth memorization.

To return to Anṣārī's early education, it is important to remark that in addition to Muḥammad Abū Manṣūr's determination to provide the most orthodox religious education to his son, he sought to extend his son's curriculum to Persian and Arabic literature. Thus, poetry was added under the supervision of a few littérateurs of Herāt. Anṣārī learned fast and memorized many passages of the Qur'ān, large numbers of ḥadīths and poems to the

<sup>289</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 29.

<sup>290</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 30.

<sup>291</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 31.

point that soon he started writing prose and poetry himself. The youth exerted himself so hard that his mother had to force-feed him. Even though the family remained destitute, friends and relatives helped. But it was the intelligence and steadfastness of Anṣārī himself that kept him in school.<sup>292</sup> He would continue to study the Qur’ān, the prophetic tradition, and poetry steadily. De Beaurecueil filed this report verbatim on behalf of Anṣārī:

*De bon matin, je me rendais chez un lecteur du Coran. Au retour, j’en écrivais six pages que j’apprenais par coeur. Ce travail une fois terminé, vers 9 heures, j’allais chez le professeur des lettres où j’écrivais le jour durant. Ayant ainsi employé tout mon temps, je n’avais aucun moment de repos. Je n’étais pas cependant au bout de mes peines et il me fallait encore travailler, si bien que la plupart du temps je prolongeais ma journée au-delà de la dernière prière du soir.*<sup>293</sup>

Once Anṣārī was deprived of his father’s care and guidance, he found spiritual and material abode with two Ṣūfī shaykhs, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Ammār Shaybānī and Abū Ismā‘īl Aḥmad Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza, known as shaykh ‘Ammū. ‘Ammār Shaybānī was an erudite Qur’ānic commentator and a staunch adversary of the Ash‘arī theology. He taught the youngster Qur’ānic commentary and generously took care of his student’s material needs. From Jāmī’s *Nafaḥāt al-uns*, de Beaurecueil quotes Anṣārī’s tribute to his teacher Y. Ibn ‘Ammār Shaybānī: «Si je ne l’avais pas rencontré, je n’aurais jamais su ouvrir la bouche en matière d’exégèse coranique,»<sup>294</sup> and he adds, «Yaḥyā était un roi sous l’habit d’un servant.»<sup>295</sup> But it was the distinguished Ṣūfī master, shaykh ‘Ammū, who picked up where Anṣārī’s father left off. The shaykh had traveled extensively in pursuit of spiritual knowledge and met venerated shaykhs in Baghdād, Mecca and all over the Khurāsān region. He built a Ṣūfī lodge (*khānqāh*) at the outskirts of Herāt where mature Ṣūfīs and novices met for spiritual exercises. His traveling routine kept him on the road and he would

<sup>292</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 31.

<sup>293</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 14.

<sup>294</sup> Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*, 124; De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 41.

<sup>295</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 41.

later appoint Anṣārī to become his successor after his death. The close relationship between the young man and his master seemed to defy the age gap and the standard master-disciple bond. De Beaurecueil writes:

*Malgré la différence d'âge, les rapports de l'enfant avec le cheikh ne furent guère ceux d'un disciple avec son maître. On voit plutôt naître entre eux une amitié, presque d'égal à égal. Si 'Ammū fait profiter l'adolescent de tout le savoir accumulé au cours de ses voyages, lui rapportant sentences et anecdotes glanées auprès des plus grands cheikhs, il n'hésite pas à se mettre à son école, avec la curiosité et la jeunesse d'âme qui semblent avoir été les traits dominants de son caractère.*<sup>296</sup>

Another important figure in his life was Abd'l-Jabbār Jarrāhī, a fine scholar in ḥadīth. He had a minor but yet decisive influence on Anṣārī. He taught his pupil the Prophetic tradition from Hakim al-Tirmidhī's *Jāmi'* (Collection). For the rest of his life, Anṣārī preferred *Jāmi'* al-Tirmidhī to Bukhārī's and Muslim's *ṣaḥīḥayni* or any other ḥadīth collection for that matter. Yet, even more than shaykh 'Ammū, who declared to the people of Quhandiz, «*Ayez 'Abdullāh en considération, car de lui émane le parfum d'un imām,*»<sup>297</sup> the most significant teacher was Shaykh Abū 'Abdallāh Taqī Sijistānī (d. c.1025), a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī. Taqī won Anṣārī's respect and reverence for his Ḥanbalīsm and his versatility in spiritual matters. The youngster seemed to strike a cord of sympathy and admiration in many of his teachers. Taqī would praise the young man in flattering terms, “O 'Abdullāh Bā Manṣūr! Praise be to God! What a light God has put in your heart!”<sup>298</sup> From Taqī, Anṣārī acquired a visceral attachment to Ḥanbalīte theology and spirituality, and also an aversion for honors, and a life-long suspicion of and indifference toward the rich and powerful. Later, he paid tribute to his teacher in these words, “He [Taqī] was my

<sup>296</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 38.

<sup>297</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 40.

<sup>298</sup> Farhādī, *'Abdullāh*, 7.

master and teacher in Ḥanbalīte creed. Had I never met him, I would never have come to know the belief of the Ḥanbalītes.”<sup>299</sup>

In his final days, Anṣārī adamantly would write in one of his poems, “I am a Ḥanbalī, while living and dying. This is my testament, O brothers .”<sup>300</sup> Makdisi asserts, “This Harawī (al-Anṣārī al-Harawī) was a Ḥanbalī; so Ḥanbalī was he that he declared that his last will and testament would be to exhort all Muslims to become Ḥanbalīs. Harawī had lived his whole Ṣūfī life and died a Ḥanbalī when Ghazzālī had not yet come to Baghdād; in fact had not as yet turned seriously to Ṣūfism.”<sup>301</sup> De Beaurecueil remarks that Ḥanbalism for Anṣārī was strictly theological and not juridical. The Pīr of Herāt was unyielding to his attachment to the letter of the Qur’ān and the Sunna, but often enough, Anṣārī adopted Shāfi‘ī solutions in jurisprudence. «*Notons bien qu’il s’agit ici de croyance (i’tiqād), non d’école juridique. En jurisprudence, Anṣārī adoptera souvent les solutions chaféites. Mais lorsqu’il s’agira de la foi, il sera toujours le disciple farouche d’Ibn Ḥanbal.*»<sup>302</sup> Similarly, in the preface of his English translation of the *Ṣad maydān*, Munir Aḥmad Mughal states, “Khwāja ‘Abdullāh followed the school of Imām Aḥmad bin. Ḥanbal in matter of *Aṣl* (fundamental) and Imām Shāfi‘ī in matter of *furū‘* (branches).”<sup>303</sup> At any rate, up to this moment, Anṣārī seemed satisfied with his life in Herāt, however, the passing away of his major teachers altered his stable life.

<sup>299</sup> Jāmī, *Nafahāt*, translation by Thackston in Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 169.

<sup>300</sup> Quoted in Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 6.

<sup>301</sup> Makdisi, *Religion*, 120.

<sup>302</sup> De Beaurecueil, *khwādja*, 43,

<sup>303</sup> *Ṣad maydān: The Hundred Fields*, trans. Munir Aḥmad Mughal (Lahore:Islamic Book Foundaiton, 1983), 18.

## 1-2 Travels

His father, Abū Manṣūr, and some important teachers such as Yaḥyā Ibn ‘Ammū, Taqī Sijistānī and many other secondary Ṣūfī teachers and traditionists contributed to the spiritual, moral and intellectual formation of the young Anṣārī. These teachers taught the Pīr of Herāt core Islamic sciences: tradition, Qur’ānic exegesis, and Ṣūfism. Unfortunately, after the death of Taqī in 1025, Anṣārī’s life took a new turn. Deeply affected by the loss of several other teachers, (qādī Manṣūr Azdī in 1019, Jarrāḥī in 1021, Jārūdī in 1023), he decided to travel to Nīshāpūr to further his education. De Beaurecueil asserts that he left a year after Taqī’s death to pursue his study of ḥadīth, and fiqh.<sup>304</sup> He also looked forward to sitting at the feet of renowned and learned teachers in order to take advantage of their scholarship, receive their blessings, and experience their company. Once in Nīshāpūr, Anṣārī collected ḥadīths largely from the students of the great traditionist Abū ‘l-‘Abbās Muḥammad ibn Ya’qūb al-Aṣamm (d. 957), most of them advanced in age, such as, Abū Sa‘īd Ṣayrafī (d. 1030), the well versed Ḥanbalī Abū ‘l-Ḥasan ‘Alī Ṭirāzī (d. 1031), the Qur‘ān commentator Abū Naṣr Manṣūr al-Mufasssīr (d. 1031), the grammarian Abū ‘l-Ḥasan Aḥmad Salīṭī (d. 1030).<sup>305</sup> But, he stayed away from all scholars of the Ash‘arīte and Mu‘tazilīte schools. He refused to hear and collect ḥadīths from the great qādī Abū Bakr al-Ḥīrī (d. 1030) because he was an Ash‘arīte in theology. He sought to receive ḥadīth only from traditionists at the exclusion of all ‘innovators.’<sup>306</sup> This uncompromising position penalized him dearly. He did not have the honor of meeting such giant scholars in Nīshāpūr as Imām Ibrāhīm al-Iṣḥfayānī (d. 1027), Abū Muḥammad al-Juwaynī (d. 1047),

<sup>304</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 16.

<sup>305</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khawādja*, 48; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 17.

<sup>306</sup> The dates of death of traditionist scholars who met Anṣārī during his first study travel are recollected in Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt*; Dhahabī, *Siyar*; Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*; Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt*. These were de Beaurecueil sources in *Khawādja*, 46 – 51. Most of the sources failed to mention their date of death and the author believes that the date were likely unknown.

(the father of the great Imām al-Ḥaramayn), Shaykh al-Islam Ismā‘īl al-Ṣābūnī (d. 1032), and Abū Qāsim al-Qushayrī who followed the Ash‘arīte theology.<sup>307</sup> Therefore, Anṣārī’s unyielding Ḥanbalīsm set him squarely in opposition to all kinds of rationalist schools. Both his zeal for learning and his staunch Ḥanbalīte stand served him well but also hurt him at times.

Unlike many Islamic scholars of his time who have traveled extensively, Anṣārī left Herāt only on a few occasions: in pursuit of knowledge in Nīshāpūr, for two attempts to perform the pilgrimage (ḥajj) in Mecca,<sup>308</sup> and exiled from his birth city for theological conflict. After his study travel to Nīshāpūr in 1026, Anṣārī agreed to accompany Imām Abū ‘l-Faḍl b. Sa‘d of Herāt to Mecca for ḥajj in 1032. But when their caravan reached Baghdād, they learned that there was a dire water shortage in Mecca and the prices were exorbitant. In addition, an epidemic of smallpox had broken out all over the Ḥijāz in Arabia and Khurāsān region. They had to abort the trip and return home.<sup>309</sup> Undeterred by the first failed attempt to go to ḥajj, Anṣārī embarked on his second attempt a year later, hoping for a better outcome.<sup>310</sup> This time around the caravan had not passed Rayy when bad news reached them. The roads between Iraq and Ḥijāz were too dangerous for travel. Many pilgrim caravans were being robbed and brutalized by bands of Bedouins. Once again, his attempt to go to ḥajj was unsuccessful. But on his way back to Herāt, Anṣārī met with some prominent Ṣūfī masters. In Damghān he visited with shaykh Muḥammad Qaṣṣāb ‘Āmulī, a disciple of the famous Abū ‘l- Qaṣṣāb.<sup>311</sup> In Nīshāpūr he had the good fortune of

<sup>307</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 50.

<sup>308</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 46, 56, and 62.

<sup>309</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 58.

<sup>310</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical*, 89; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 18 - 19; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 62.

<sup>311</sup> In her translation of Kharaqānī’s utterances, Christiane Tortel remarks that Kharaqānī was under the spiritual tutelage of Abū ‘l-‘Abbās Qaṣṣāb ‘Āmulī, see *Parole d’un Soufi: Abu’l -Ḥasan Kharaqānī (352 – 425/960 - 1033)*, trans. Christiane Tortel (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 8. See also, “La notice sur le Shaykh Abū ‘l -‘Abbās al-Qaṣṣāb al-‘Āmulī,” 232 - 236.

meeting the Ṣūfī Shaykh ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad Abū ‘l- Ḥasan Kharaqānī (d. 1033).<sup>312</sup> In *Kharaqānī: Paroles d’un Soufi*, Christiane Tortel remarks that Kharaqānī was hailed as a supreme master and a *Quṭb* of his time in spiritual matters. By his insightful words, he was in the spiritual, mystical and historical genealogy of those who bear the divine light. He was illiterate but unparalleled in mystical matters, and distinguished himself by the power of his ecstatic sayings. Sultans and established Ṣūfī masters sought his counsel and spiritual wisdom. Most of his phrases were bold utterances in which the humility of the masters collided with God’s glory.<sup>313</sup> During Anṣārī’s visit with Kharaqānī, the Shaykh mesmerized the young Anṣārī to the point that he declared later, “Had I never met Kharaqānī, I would never have known Reality. He mixed, constantly, this and That, namely, the self and Reality.”<sup>314</sup> De Beaurecueil adds, “The Reality (ḥaqīqah) is the secret of the mystical life, beyond the appearances.”<sup>315</sup> Kharaqānī was not a scholar or theorizer of spiritual life but he was a Ṣūfī without guile. How did this critical encounter occur? Fate had it that while in Nīshāpūr, Anṣārī ran into the famous Ṣūfī Abū Sa‘id Abū ‘l-Khayr (d. 1049) who told him about Kharaqānī.<sup>316</sup> The elderly and illiterate Ṣūfī would have the deepest impact on Anṣārī’s mystical journey. Schimmel reports, “This enthusiastic and demanding master [Kharaqānī] caused a spiritual change in ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī, with the result that Anṣārī began to write his commentary on the Koran, which was, unhappily, never finished.”<sup>317</sup> Kharaqānī read into Anṣārī’s heart and answered his spoken and unspoken fundamental questions. “He not only deterred Anṣārī from trying to go on pilgrimage by making him

<sup>312</sup> Nicholson. *Studies*, 42 - 44; Angha, *An Annotated*, 35 - 39.

<sup>313</sup> *Kharaqānī*, trans. Tortel, 7 - 13.

<sup>314</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 20; de Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 14. The meeting between Anṣārī and Kharaqānī is similar to the fateful encounter centuries later between Jalāl al-din Rūmī (d. 1273) and Shams al-din Tabrīzī.

<sup>315</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 20; de Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 14.

<sup>316</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 35.

<sup>317</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical*, 90.



realize that ‘God was as likely to be in Khurāsān as in Ḥijāz ’ but also instructed him to start training his own disciples.”<sup>318</sup> Farhādī reported that while in conversation with Anṣārī, “Kharāqānī went into ecstasy and burst in tears.”<sup>319</sup> From Kharāqānī, Anṣārī learned that to be a Ṣūfī does not consist of outward appearances, “one does not become a Ṣūfī by virtue of one’s patched frock and prayer mat; one does not become Ṣūfī by adopting the customs and manners of the Ṣūfīs; a Ṣūfī is that which is not!” and, as Kharāqānī concluded, “A Ṣūfī is a day that has no need of the sun, a night that has no need of the moon and the stars, a ‘not-being’ that has no being.”<sup>320</sup> De Beaurecueil believes that two masters have mostly inspired Anṣārī, Taqī al-Sijistānī and Kharāqānī. The first made him a Ḥanbalī and the second a Ṣūfī. He writes, «*Espion des coeurs, comme Taqī Sijistānī, le vieux paysan illettré avait marqué la vie d’ Anṣārī. Sa rencontre lui tint lieu de Pèlerinage et il n’essaiera plus de se rendre à la Mekke.*»<sup>321</sup>

After meeting with the ecstatic Kharāqānī, Anṣārī viewed Ṣūfism as “something that neither harms the soles of the feet nor leaves a trail of dust behind.”<sup>322</sup> For him a Ṣūfī perfects him/herself through actions of genuine humility and frees her/himself from the pitfalls of pride. He returned to Herāt and embarked on teaching ḥadīth, Qur’ān commentary, and Ṣūfism. At the age of twenty seven, Anṣārī was ready to take on teaching responsibilities after being schooled by different teachers in and out of Herāt. Hence, the first trip to Nīshāpūr (1026) after the death of his childhood teachers, and the two failed attempts to go to Mecca for ḥajj (1032 - 1033) gave him the opportunity to meet key traditionist Ṣūfīs, ḥadīth and Qur’ān scholars. These study trips crystallized his skills, and

<sup>318</sup> Karamustafa, *Ṣūfism*, 94. Kharāqānī’s counsel is reminiscence of al-Ḥallāj’s (and many other Ṣūfī masters) concept of the spiritual ḥajj.

<sup>319</sup> Farhādī, *‘Abdullāh*, 13.

<sup>320</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā‘illāh* 172.

<sup>321</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 20.

<sup>322</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā‘illāh*, 172.

the encounter with Kharaqānī offered the spiritual impetuous he had been looking for in life. Anṣārī was ready to gather around him a circle of disciples and students. Soon enough, his lectures were attended by senior Ṣūfis and learned folks of Herāt and its surroundings.<sup>323</sup> Anṣārī was an erudite orator and a bold preacher. He lectured at the Ṣūfī lodges and at the mosques. There, he triumphed before his audiences. He exerted his utmost talents in full consciousness. As an orator and a preacher, Anṣārī was perfectly at home with himself. He declared, «*Celui qui n'a pas vu ma manière de tenir mes réunions et d'y prêcher et qui lance contre moi des propos injurieux je lui pardonne.*»<sup>324</sup> Those years after he returned from Nīshāpūr were fruitful and calm. However, it was calm before the storm. Soon enough, Anṣārī would engage in polemics and debates against rationalist theologians. As a result, he suffered trials and hardship at the hands of his rivals. His literalist reading of the Qur'ān led to accusations of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*). But, similarly, to Imām Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), his white martyrdom (harassment, exile and prison) would be vindicated later. His fame grew and the multiple public persecutions of Ash'arī and Saljūq political authorities did not deter Anṣārī's staunch criticism against rationalism of all types.

## 2 Hardship and Triumph (1042 - 1063)

As noted earlier in this chapter, Anṣārī had to confront in his town opposing and clashing schools of thought about key theological issues: God's essence and attributes, the created or uncreated nature of the Qur'ān, literal or metaphoric hermeneutic of the Qur'ān, and ḥadīth, predestination, human agency and free will. As a solid Ḥanbalī, he was convinced that the teaching of the prophetic tradition could not remain neutral. He opposed head on what he considered vain discussions, and above all, a sacrilegious intrusion of

<sup>323</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 15.

<sup>324</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 125.

reason where the Qur'ānic revelations had settled the matter. He advocated a literal reading of the text and submission to its letter even though humans could not explain the modality (the why and how). He attacked the Ash'arīs and Mu'tazilīs publicly and sparked a serious conflict between him and them. In 1039, the Sultan Mas'ūd was visiting Herāt, and Anṣārī's adversaries sought to denounce him and obtain his condemnation for anthropomorphism.<sup>325</sup> Summoned before the Sultan, Anṣārī defended his position by reciting the Qur'ānic passages and ḥadīth that mentioned God's throne, hands, and face. The Sultan Mas'ūd, as de Beaurecueil remarks, had other more urgent affairs to handle than to worry about Anṣārī's alleged anthropomorphism. He was dismissed with honor.<sup>326</sup> This victory would be short lived. After Mas'ūd was suddenly assassinated in 1041, a group of theologians gathered and banned Anṣārī from teaching and holding meetings. He was forced to leave Herāt and sought refuge in nearby Chakīwan. In 1044, he returned to Herāt, and resumed his teachings. He was forty years old, had matured, and been seasoned by several ordeals. De Beaurecueil believes that Anṣārī restarted his major commentary on the Qur'ān upon his return. He adopted his former teacher Y. Ibn 'Ammār's methodology, but he went beyond a literal treatment of the sacred text to pay attention to questions raised by the text.<sup>327</sup> Sadly, forty-three years later at his death, his commentary on the Qur'ān had not been brought to a successful conclusion.

At the time of his return in Herāt in 1041, even with a greater sense of spiritual maturity, his troubles were not over. In 1046, another alliance of Ash'arīte and Mu'tazilite theologians took advantage of the political confusion and condemned Anṣārī. This time they exiled and imprisoned him in Būchanj (two days walk from Herāt). As usual, prison

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<sup>325</sup> Farhādī, *'Abdullāh*, 8; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 25.

<sup>326</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 25.

<sup>327</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 90.

and exile were a time of deep soul searching and heavy spiritual exercises for him. He recalled Taqī's and Kharaqānī's wisdom and advice and decided to return to the essentials in his teaching and preaching. According to de Beaurecueil, he meditated hours on this passage Q. 2: 160 - 65.<sup>328</sup> Fortunately for Anṣārī, this later imprisonment would last just a year. His days of trials then seemed over and he would experience tranquility for a long while.<sup>329</sup> Upon his return to Herāt, he taught and commented extensively on Q. 2: 160 - 65. He focused his lectures solely on the spiritual life, understood as a perpetual effort to love God according to the Qur'ān and the Prophetic example. For a little while, Anṣārī dropped his polemics against rationalist theologians. The reason might be that on the military front, Mawdūd, son and heir of Mas'ūd's throne, was battling the Turkmen to salvage his power. The people of Herāt were deeply preoccupied by the political situation and tired of theological skirmishes.

For Anṣārī, the triumph of the Saljūq Sultan Tughrīl Beg over Mas'ūd of Ghazna ushered in an era of tranquility. Tughrīl Beg's vizier Abū Naṣr Kundurī chased the 'innovators' and cursed them out rightly.<sup>330</sup> Many scholars lost their teaching positions, were harassed, silenced, imprisoned or had to flee. Al-Qushayrī intervened to defend the rationalist schools but to no avail. He wrote a treatise bemoaning the state of the community at war with itself and torn apart by hatred and theological oppositions. Thus, Qushayrī, in his *Shikāyat ahl al-Sunna bi-ḥikāya ma nālahum min al-miḥna* (The complaint of the people of Sunna in telling the story of what has befallen on them during the inquisition), defended the rationalists cause, but he could not stop the persecution.

Another giant, Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 1085), was forced to flee from Nīshāpūr

<sup>328</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 40. Verse 165 seemed to have been the kernel of his meditation. Faithfulness to the book of God and the example of the Messenger of God guided his thought and teaching.

<sup>329</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 27.

<sup>330</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 41 - 43. de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 27.

to the Ḥijāz.<sup>331</sup> For Anṣārī, it was a time of vindication. For the next eleven years, he enjoyed peace and prestige (1053 - 1064).<sup>332</sup> His fame reached far beyond the Khurāsān region and renowned scholars sought to meet him, such as two prominent Baghdad's poets, Abū 'l-Ḥasan al Bakharzī, and Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Zuzanī (known as al-Barī). They traveled to Herāt to sit at the feet of the Pīr and listen to his lectures on the Qur'ān, and the Sunna, but also to enjoy his mystical poems.<sup>333</sup>

Determined to assert his Ḥanbalīte Ṣūfism against all odds, Anṣārī launched a renewed systematic attack against those he labeled 'innovators.' His determination, however, was quelled by a change of power in Baghdad. Tughrīl Beg's successor Alp Arslān (1063 - 72) and his great vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (1072 - 92) were now in power. The Sultan and his vizier were Ash'arite in theology and Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī in *madhhab* respectively. Thus, Anṣārī ran into trouble again. In 1064, while Niẓām al-Mulk was passing through Herāt, Anṣārī was summoned before him to answer to accusations put forward by Shāfi'ī and Ḥanafī jurists. According to de Beaurecueil and Farhādī, Anṣārī was challenged to engage in theological debate with his opponents. Called upon by the vizier to answer a specific question, Anṣārī replied, "I do not discuss matters other than what I have in my left and right sleeves." And the vizier asked, "so what do have in your sleeves?" Anṣārī replied, "In my right sleeve, the Book of God, and in my left, the Sunna of the Messenger of God."<sup>334</sup> The vizier dismissed him without any blame and canceled the debate, but his opponents did not give up. Two years later, they convinced the vizier Niẓām al-Mulk to exile Anṣārī to Balkh for a year.<sup>335</sup>

<sup>331</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 27.

<sup>332</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 94.

<sup>333</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 9; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 27. The *Munājāt* is particularly loved by ordinary people as well as poets and educated men and women alike.

<sup>334</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 29; Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 9.

<sup>335</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 43; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 106 – 7 and *Chemin*, 29.

### 3 The End Game

Concisely, de Beaurecueil describes Anṣārī final years:

*Loin de ralentir ses activités, l'infirmité le décide à dicter ses oeuvres les plus importantes à des disciples jeunes et fervents: le volumineux Blâme du Kalām et de ceux qui s'y adonnent, en 474/1082; Les Etapes des Itinérants vers Dieu, l'année suivante, suivies de peu par l'opuscule intitulé Les Déficiences des Demeures. Sans doute Les Générations de Soufis datent-elles de cette époque.*<sup>336</sup>

During his last years (1080 - 89), Anṣārī experienced “celebrity and grandeur”<sup>337</sup> but also the infirmities of old age. Respect and reverence due to a master-teacher arrived almost at a time when Anṣārī had lost his sight at the age of 74. In 1082, Niẓām al Mulk convinced the caliph al-Muqtadī, to honor Anṣārī as his predecessor had done.<sup>338</sup> Anṣārī received another robe of honor along with honorific titles. According to de Beaurecueil, Niẓām al-Mulk’s move was more a political tactic than a genuine action. He used the opportunity to maintain peace in Herāt between Anṣārī and his disciples on one side, and rationalist theologians on the other. These honors were meant to quell any attempts to stir up unrest and conflict and nothing more.<sup>339</sup> Most importantly, the Pīr of Herāt harnessed all his energy to dictate his last didactic manuals for wayfarers and to attack rationalist theologians. Subsequent to his lost of vision and with an awareness of his own end, he seems to have been prompted to accelerate his instruction to his faithful disciples. Anṣārī knew that time was running out and death was near. Among his closest students and scribes the following are worth mentioning: Abd ’l-Awwal, the ḥāfiẓ ‘Abū ’l Khayr ‘Abdallāh ibn Marzūq, ‘Abū Naṣr al-Mu’tamin Sājī, ‘Abd ’l-Malik Karrukhī, Muḥammad Saydalānī, Muḥammad Ibn Ṭāhir Maqdisī and Yūsuf al-Hamadhānī, the inheritor of his legacy.<sup>340</sup> At the age of 83, Anṣārī

<sup>336</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 21.

<sup>337</sup> Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 10; Angha, *An Annotated*, 44.

<sup>338</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 134.

<sup>339</sup> Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 112.

<sup>340</sup> Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh, 10; de Beaurecueil, *E.I.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 515 and *Khwādja*, 120 - 23. He gives short biographies of the master’s major disciples. Mughal also gives a list of twelve names who were the pupils of the master. In

died in the city of his birth on Friday, March 8<sup>th</sup> 1089 and was buried in Gāzargāh, near the Shaykh ‘Ammū’s tomb and *Khānqāh*.<sup>341</sup>

There is a consensus on the Pīr of Herāt’s legacy. “His biographers are unanimous in praising his piety, the breadth of his knowledge in all branches of the religious sciences, and the indomitable fervor of his devotion to the Qur’ān and the Sunna, and the school of Ibn Ḥanbal, which led him to be accused by his enemies of bigoted fanaticism and anthropomorphism.”<sup>342</sup> Two periods marked this unique life, an time of formation (from birth to his meeting with Kharaqānī) and a phase of teaching (from his return from the 2<sup>nd</sup> failed attempt to go to ḥajj to his death).<sup>343</sup> Three exiles, two imprisonments, political unrest and theological upheavals, through them all, Anṣārī remained true and unyielding to his Ḥanbalīte theology and spirituality. After the storm, he experienced peace and honor. When he lost his sight later in life, he finally acceded to his disciples’ request to dictate his most important manuals for the wayfarers on the spiritual journey. De Beaurecueil summarizes his life:

*Nobādhān le rappelait à l’humilité, l’engageant spirituellement sur un long itinéraire où les épreuves scanderont la marche. Ici, la vie du soufi recoupe celle du polémiste: l’emprisonnement du Būshanj, en 438 H., fera découvrir à Anṣārī la voie de l’amour, qui inspirera longtemps son commentaire du Coran. L’exil à Balkh, en 456 H., au delà de l’amour lui révélera que tout vient de Dieu dans la vie spirituelle. Il retrouvera ainsi peu à peu, en l’expérimentant dans la souffrance, la Réalité intérieure sur laquelle Kharaqānī lui avait ouvert de si fulgurantes échappées. Ce sera chose faite, semble-t-il lorsque, devenu aveugle, il dictera à ses jeunes disciples le Livre des Etapes.*<sup>344</sup>

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*Ṣad maydān*, 18.

<sup>341</sup> See his tomb and shrine, Table 1

<sup>342</sup> De Beaurecueil, *El*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 515.

<sup>343</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khawādja*, 146.

<sup>344</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khawādja*, 148.

Anṣārī was a gifted and erudite mystic<sup>345</sup> but also aggressive and belligerent against his opponents in theology. He was “one of the outstanding figures in Khurāsān in 11<sup>th</sup> century: commentator of the Qur’ān, traditionist, polemicist, and spiritual master, known for his oratory and poetic talents in Arabic and Persian.”<sup>346</sup> De Beaurecueil refers to Anṣārī as his master and teacher. In his biography of Anṣārī, there is a kind of posthumous conversation between the Dominican friar and his ‘patron saint.’ A kind of Anṣārī’s ‘*mémoire d’outre tombe*’ written by de Beaurecueil. His biography of the master is the most comprehensive and well documented in any western language. It is no wonder that Farhādī translated it into Persian.<sup>347</sup> To the best of our knowledge, all scholars of Anṣārī in Islamic and western languages take de Beaurecueil’s entire scholarship very seriously. He read and studied Anṣārī as a disciple and as a devotee would study his or her master. He called upon Anṣārī in his prayers and in intimate conversations. In a sense there seems to be a real similarity between de Beaurecueil’s relationship to Anṣārī and Massignon to al-Ḥallāj, or Corbin to Yayḥā. Suhrawardī. There is very little or no reminiscence of manifest incompatibilities between his teacher’s faith tradition, Islam, and his, Roman Catholic faith. Maybe the real hint of the Dominican friar’s ‘obsession’ with his master lies here:

*Ainsi la volonté, le renoncement, l’abandon, la patience, la tristesse, la crainte, l’espérance, l’action de grâces, l’amour et la nostalgie sont les étapes des gens de la loi qui vont en quête de l’essence de la Réalité. Lorsqu’ils ont vu l’essence de la Réalité, les étapes des itinérants s’y évanouissent, si bien que s’anéantit ce qui n’a pas toujours été et subsiste ce qui n’a jamais cessé d’être. Alors que subsistera la face de ton Seigneur. C LV 27<sup>348</sup>*

Anṣārī’s biography is a window into the complex reasons of de Beaurecueil’s scholarship. Also, Le Saulchoir, the geography of Afghanistan and countless circumstantial

<sup>345</sup> See Karamustafa, *Şūfism*, 94; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 28; *Knowledge of God in Classical Şūfism*, trans. John Renard (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 294; Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 165.

<sup>346</sup> See de Beaurecueil’s article “‘Abdullāh Anṣārī” in *Elr*

<sup>347</sup> Farhādī, *Sarguzasht-i Pir-i Hirāt :Khvāja ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī*.

<sup>348</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 143.



events form the main features of de Beaurecueil's own biography. The narrative of both lives prepares the ground for the spiritual and mystical connections, which is the subject matter of the following chapters. Both men were very different in temperament. Anṣārī was a fierce polemicist who did not hesitate to use violence against his rivals and de Beaurecueil shied away from any theological confrontation. The spiritual connections between them seemed to defy centuries of separation and negotiate incommensurable differences in terms of religion, culture and civilization. The first and second chapters of this study have laid bare those differences in order to understand the following two chapters. These two biographical narratives, and particularly the master's biography, hint at the real interest of a 20<sup>th</sup> century French Dominican friar who will find a spiritual teacher in a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Khurāsān. Those narratives of '*deux hommes de Dieu*' unveil their personalities and show the force of their influential teachers. The Ṣūfī Shaykh 'Alī ibn Aḥmad Abū 'l- Ḥasan Kharāqānī (d. 1033) was as influential upon Anṣārī as Marie Dominique Chenu (d. 1990) was upon de Beaurecueil. Concerning de Beaurecueil, the context in which he worked and the ways in which his work and ideas took shape shed essential light on the following chapters III and IV. They will focus on de Beaurecueil's intellectual biography which is largely his erudition on works attributed to Anṣārī, and finally, the thrust of the friar's scholarship is his *praxis mystica*. His endeavor represents a significant and unique path in the sea of Dominican scholarship on Islam.

### *Chapter III Via illuminativa*

Now  
 these Hundred Grounds  
 are all absorbed (*mustaghraq*)  
 in the Ground of love (*maḥabba*)!  
 The Ground of Friendship (*dūsti*) is the Ground of Love.  
 Words of God, the Most Exalted, "... a people He loves and who love Him..."  
 (Q. 5:54). "Say: 'If you love (*tuḥibbūn*) God ...'" (Q. 3:31).  
 And love has three stages:  
 first of all: uprightness (*rāstī*);  
 at midway, drunkenness (*mastī*); and,  
 finally, annihilation (*nīstī*).  
 And praise be to God, the First and the Last!<sup>349</sup>

*Personne ne témoigne réellement de Dieu qu'il est Unique,  
 puisque quiconque s'imagine le faire Le renie.  
 Le témoignage de celui qui énonce pareille épithète  
 N'est qu'une phrase vaine, nullifiée par l'Unique.  
 Dieu seul fait l'Unique! C'est Lui-même qui unifie Son unité!  
 Et l'homme qui s'y essaie mérite l'épithète d'athée.*<sup>350</sup>

<sup>349</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 72. Anṣārī's interpretation of the ultimate field, love (*maḥabba*) could be read in Christian terms as the *via unitiva*, the consummation and goal of a wayfarer's spiritual journey. See de Beaurecueil's translation in *Chemin*, 149 - 150.

<sup>350</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 229.

De Beaurecueil's intellectual and spiritual journey echoes the wayfarer's pathway. One could say that his academic investigation of the spiritual thought of Anṣārī is the *via illuminativa*, and his *praxis mystica* is the *via unitiva*. The depth and breadth of both Anṣārī's work and de Beaurecueil's scholarship would need multiple volumes of writing. De Beaurecueil's mystical intuition led him to focus primarily on the master's spiritual manuals.<sup>351</sup> Attentive to this intuition, this chapter intends to survey Anṣārī's bibliography with a focus on his spiritual teachings. Our study will draw attention to how this erudite and mystical conversation transformed de Beaurecueil's religious *weltanschauung* from what Marcel Bataillon called «*un orientalisme sèchement érudit*,»<sup>352</sup> to Claude Geffré's hopeful remark, «*Et comme chaque fois que nous prenons l'autre vraiment au sérieux dans son altérité, nous sommes invités à une meilleure intelligence de notre propre identité.*»<sup>353</sup> Therefore, de Beaurecueil's research on the master's body of work could be understood as a *maydān* (field) or a *manzil* (station), to borrow a term from the mystical path of Islam. This illuminative path toward a fuller mystical encounter, the *via unitiva*, is our focus in this chapter.

In other words, de Beaurecueil's erudition is the backdrop of his pastoral mysticism in the land of his master. Hence, the energy or life-giving principle of his work in Kabul is rooted in his Dominican spirituality and years of scholarship on the master's spiritual thought and teachings. This chapter explores the heart of Anṣārī's work through selections of de Beaurecueil's annotations, translations and commentaries on the most important and widely circulated books attributed to the Pīr of Herāt. It offers an overview of the entire collection of books attributed to Anṣārī and touches upon authenticity and reliability

<sup>351</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin de Dieu* and *Cris du Coeur* are cases in point.

<sup>352</sup> Marcel Bataillon, «Louis Massignon, professeur au Collège de France, » *Lettres Françaises*, no. Spécial. 15.

<sup>353</sup> Claude Geffré, «Le Coran, une parole de Dieu différente, » *Lumière et Vie*, no. 163, 21 - 32.

questions about the corpus. In addition, our investigation focuses on the most representative treatises from the master's spiritual teachings: *ʿIlal al-maqāmāt* (The Flaws in the Stages), *Kitāb ṣad maydān* (The Hundred Fields)<sup>354</sup> and *Kitāb manāzil al-sāʿirīn* (The Stages of the Wayfarers), and concludes with Anṣārī's most popular collection of intimate conversations with God, the *Munājāt*.

Before delving into the heart of the matter and as noted earlier in the introduction of this dissertation, de Beaurecueil's trajectory resembles in many ways Massignon's and this chapter gives a glimpse of the parallel between the two scholars. Massignon and de Beaurecueil are significantly close in many respects. Massignon's erudition on al-Ḥallāj's life and work was his *via illuminativa*.<sup>355</sup> Both Massignon and de Beaurecueil immersed themselves deeply within the Muslim world and schooled themselves in Islamic mysticism and their lives were *«le lieu d'une présence offerte à la rencontre.»*<sup>356</sup> To be clear, these two men were quite different, Massignon was an erudite orientalist but not a theologian, and nothing in de Beaurecueil's life is comparable to Massignon's dramatic religious experience of May 1908.<sup>357</sup> But, like Massignon, the Dominican friar saw a number of

<sup>354</sup> *Manāzil al-sāʿirīn* was written in Arabic while *Ṣad maydān* was in Persian.

<sup>355</sup> *L'Herne: Massignon*, ed. J. Fr. Six, 256 - 258; 274 - 281.

<sup>356</sup> The writer borrows this phrase from Pierre Claverie, "Lecture du Coran," *Spiritus*, 126 (1992): 34.

<sup>357</sup> The episode of Massignon's dramatic spiritual experience, "the visitations of the Stranger" is reported by most of his biographers. See *L'Herne: Massignon*, ed. J. Fr. Six, 182 - 187; *Testimonies and Reflections: Essays of Louis Massignon*, selected and introduced by Herbert Mason, (Notre Dame (IN): University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), Christian Destermou et Jean Moncelon, *Louis Massignon*, (Paris: Plon, 1991). In 1908, Massignon was sent on an archaeological mission in Baghdād and allowed by the Walī to live in the old quarters of Hayderkaneh among Muslims. He was the guest of the Alusi family. During his expedition in the desert for a topographical survey around the tomb of al-Ḥallāj, he also discovered the castle of Okeidir. But he fell into a political turmoil, was captured by the Turks, accused of being a French spy, taken as a prisoner, and threatened with imminent execution. Massignon tried unsuccessfully to take his own life. The first stage of his conversion took place at this moment or "the first visitation of the stranger." He was sent to a hospital in Baghdād where he arrived in a dire state of acute malaria that led to a loss of consciousness. In the night of May 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>, Massignon believed that his death was near. Later, when he regained consciousness, he was no longer a prisoner. The Alusi family, who were his landlords, secured his release and nursed him back to health. Massignon recalled that the first thing he heard upon waking up was the litany of Muslim friends praying for him in Arabic, probably reciting Q: 31, for dying persons. His experience of captivity and the hospitality of a Muslim family were decisive moment in his life because they led him back to the Catholic faith. He experienced the presence of God as the 'Stranger.' He attributed his survival to the prayers of his longtime friend Joris Karl Huysmans (French novelist and close family friend), the Alusi family and al-

providential signs, or at least events by which he understood his vocation as God's call to live and work among Muslims.

In his article "Serge de Beaurecueil,"<sup>358</sup> Louis Duprée explores a couple of these major signs. According to the author, de Beaurecueil considered his encounter with Abbé Aquity in 1931, at the age of fourteen, the first providential sign. The priest would suggest that de Beaurecueil investigate the Dominican Order of St. Thomas Aquinas. This first sign would lead him to become a friar preacher. The second sign launched his career in Afghanistan. In the spring of 1946 and on his way to the IDEO, de Beaurecueil, traveled from France to Egypt on a British army transport and by chance met Mr. Momal, who was at the time a teacher at the Lycée Istesqlāl in Kabul. In the words of Duprée, "Momal kindled de Beaurecueil's interest in Afghanistan. However it was years later before Serge interpreted the meeting as another 'sign.'"<sup>359</sup> According to de Beaurecueil these signs were providential calls to what Marie Dominique Chenu's aptly terms "*l'Islam comme vocation*," namely for him, the life and work of Anṣārī.

Furthermore, Massignon and de Beaurecueil shared a similar mystical attraction and theological convictions. Their remarkable lives were the focal point of an intense mystical conversation between two religious figures who lived centuries apart, in two completely different civilizations, and above all, who were members of different faith traditions. For them, none of their erudite work was purely scholarly; but they were subsumed within their passionate exploration of these unfathomable questions: what is the place of Islam in the

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Ḥallāj. Massignon wrote his recollection of this seminal event in "*Visitation de l'Étranger*" in Destremau and Moncelon, *Massignon*, 61 - 62. The latter authors remark that «*En face d'un événement de cet ordre, le biographe se trouve un peu désarmé, et la prudence s'impose. Louis Massignon n'est ni un mythomane ni un falsificateur. On en veut pour preuve sa fidélité à cette expérience unique. Enfin, et cela est peut-être l'essentiel, Massignon va trouver peu de temps après cette Visitation la foi catholique.*» 62.

<sup>358</sup> Duprée, "Serge de Beaurecueil," *South Asia Series*, vol. 20, issue 8, (1976): 1 - 9.

<sup>359</sup> Duprée, "Serge de Beaurecueil," *South Asia Series*, 2. De Beaurecueil was a teacher and students' advisor at Lycée Istesqlāl from 1965 to 1983. It was during that period that he understood the providential sign of 1946.

history of salvation? What are its challenges to Christian theology? Both men were examples of a genuine act of hospitality towards and dialogue with the religious other. Their lives were testimonies and challenges to Christians to recognize that certain aspects of God's mystery are better lived, and realized in a much deeper manner in other faith traditions than in Christianity.<sup>360</sup> For a Dominican friar to consider an eleventh century Ṣūfī shaykh his master deserves not only attention but a careful exploration. The encounter between Beaurecueil and Anṣārī's work and life is pregnant with possibilities but also could be a potential source of confusion.

This inquiry sheds light on de Beaurecueil's hermeneutic and mystical conversation with the master. From 1946 to his death in 2005, de Beaurecueil's entire life was centered around the life and thought of Anṣārī, his spiritual master. The groundwork took place at the IDEO in Cairo from 1946 to 1963. These years were studious, in terms of mastering Arabic and Persian, hunting for and learning techniques of editing ancient manuscripts, reading the master's work and publishing academic papers in major journals, mainly, in the *BIFAO* and the *MIDEO*.<sup>361</sup> His religious brothers, Georges Anawati (d. 1994) and Jacques Jomier (d. 2008) would be constant examples of hard work and dedication. Hence, in the environment of the IDEO, de Beaurecueil assumed almost religiously his investigation of mystical Islam with a focus on the Pīr of Herāt. The chapter tracks his painstaking investigation of the master's corpus. The first section offers a sketch of the bibliography attributed to the master, the second focuses on three major spiritual treatises. Finally, the chapter concludes with a study of the most beloved spiritual teachings of Anṣārī.

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<sup>360</sup> Dupuis, "Les religions comme voie de salut," *Spiritus*, no. 126, 13.

<sup>361</sup> In 1948, de Beaurecueil published his first article in the *BIFAO*, " 'Ilāhi-Nāmē de Ḥwāgē Abdullāh Anṣārī,' " and in 1957, he started a series of articles entitled *Anṣārīyyāt*. Later, he continued to publish in both *BIFAO* and *MIDEO* until his departure to Kabul in 1963.

## *I Anṣārī's Corpus* <sup>362</sup>

Nahid Angha, a Ṣūfī and Shī'ī, wrote her dissertation on Anṣārī's *Ṣad maydān* and her investigation brings a fresh insight to de Beaurecueil's work. She states that :

Abdu'llāh Anṣārī's spiritual and literary expertise covers an extensive domain from spiritual and religious teachings to works of literature and poetry, from exegesis of the Qur'ān to the stations of the spiritual journey, devotional invocations and biographies of Ṣūfīs and teachers."<sup>363</sup>

De Beaurecueil could not agree more. On February 9, 1971, de Beaurecueil presented his lifetime research on Anṣārī's spiritual thought and life in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of *doctorat d'État* at the Sorbonne.<sup>364</sup> It was a moment of great achievement in his long career as a scholar of the mystical dimensions of Islam, and particularly, his investment on the life and spiritual writings attributed to Anṣārī. At that time, de Beaurecueil was the best biographer, exegete and translator of the Pīr of Herāt's corpus in Western languages.<sup>365</sup>

However, de Beaurecueil's long-time friend Roger Arnaldez (d. 2006), the rapporteur of the jury of his doctoral defense, captured the quintessential mood of de Beaurecueil's presentation at the Sorbonne, «*Vous avez parlé de travaux (présentés par vous), mais il y a là plus que des travaux, il y a une oeuvre, dont on regrette seulement qu'elle soit une oeuvre inachevée.*»<sup>366</sup> Unfortunately, the jury's request was never fulfilled. De Beaurecueil never wrote a comprehensive treatise on the master's entire corpus.

<sup>362</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 23 - 52; Farhādī. 'Abdullāh, 17 - 117; De Beaurecueil, *Khawādjā*, 172 - 310.

<sup>363</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 45.

<sup>364</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Présentation d' Anṣārī,» *MIDEO* 11(1972): 291 - 300.

<sup>365</sup> On two important occasions, first in 1963, the 900th lunar anniversary of the master's death, and second in 1977, on the lunar millennium of his birthday, de Beaurecueil did a review of the scholarship on Anṣārī at each occasion with the names of scholars in western, Arabic and Persian worlds, and publications on the master's life and spiritual thought. See de Beaurecueil, «Le neuvième centenaire lunaire de la mort de Khwāja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī Harawī,» *MIDEO* 7 (1963): 219 - 240; and «Le millénaire lunaire de la naissance de Khwāja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī Harawī (396 H.),» *MIDEO* 13 (1977): 305 - 314.

<sup>366</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Présentation d'Anṣārī, » *MIDEO* 11 (1972): 291.

Certainly, there were possibilities for further research into the spiritual acumen of the Pīr of Herāt, and de Beaurecueil was the first to recognize it. He noted in his presentation: *«Tout serait à reprendre et à compléter pour une publication éventuelle, et ma vie à Kaboul ne m'en laisse guère le loisir. On peut d'ailleurs se demander si d'autres travaux concernant Anṣārī ne seraient pas d'un intérêt plus immédiat pour les orientalistes.»*<sup>367</sup> Likewise, in his biography of the master written in 1965, de Beaurecueil made a similar remark, *«Est-il nécessaire de dire que le présent travail n'a pas la prétention d'être définitif et ne représente qu'une étape dans la recherche? Bien des éléments nous font encore défaut pour écrire la biographie d'Anṣārī de façon satisfaisante.»*<sup>368</sup> For de Beaurecueil, academic recognition for his work was secondary to a deep motivation at the source of his scholarship. For him, mysticism was universal in nature and concrete in expression, and Anṣārī was more than the subject of a dissertation or an orientalist's erudition. He devoted his energy, gifts and personal resources to the spiritual astuteness of a religious other. Chronologically, de Beaurecueil's scholarship on the Pīr of Herāt's work falls in two major periods: at the IDEO from 1946 to 1965, then from 1965 to 1985, he devoted his time and energy to the well being of Kabul's street children and finally from 1985 to his death in 2005 he returned to scholarship.

In his biographical collection on Anṣārī, de Beaurecueil gives an account of the master's bibliography both in Persian and Arabic. In terms of Persian mystical history, Anṣārī was a pioneer in many ways. He was the first to produce in local Persian dialect a short mnemonic treatise on a difficult and complex subject matter like Ṣūfism, namely, *Ṣad maydān*. Even though Ḥujwīrī's *Kashf al-maḥjūb* (Revelation of the Mystery) in

<sup>367</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Présentation d' Anṣārī, » *MIDEO* 11 (1972): 299.

<sup>368</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khawādja*, 10 - 11.



Persian and Qushayrī's *Risāla* in Arabic<sup>369</sup> were also early works on the meaning of key Sūfī terms and discussed metaphysical and theological issues, “*Ṣad maydān* remains,” as Pūrjavādī writes, “the first independent and single classic written in Persian to address stations and the levels of *sulūk*, the inner journey.”<sup>370</sup> Farhādī agrees with Pūrjavādī and adds, “His [Anṣārī] *Hundred Grounds*, however, retains its importance as the first didactic treatise on Sūfism to be written in Persian, and specifically intended to serve as a mnemonic manual for mystics.”<sup>371</sup> His *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya* (The Generations of the Sūfīs) and *Kashf al-asrār* (Unveiling of the Secrets) are both pioneering works in Persian mystical tradition.

De Beaurecueil remarks that the master's spiritual treatises influenced generations of scholars and Sūfīs within and without his immediate circles. He found over forty manuscripts and examined the work of many commentators on *Manāzil* from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to our current time.<sup>372</sup> In addition *ʿIlal al-maqāmāt*, *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil* were read, meditated upon, commented on and used by Sūfīs as far as Andalusia, where Ibn al-ʿArīf (d. 1141), Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240) and Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 1374) wrote commentaries on the master's work.<sup>373</sup> Likewise, Ibn Taymiyya's famous student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) wrote one of the most comprehensive commentaries on the master's *Manāzil*.<sup>374</sup> The Pīr of Herāt's teachings on the spiritual journey of the wayfarers have become standards in both the Persian and the Arabic worlds.

Farhādī classified the works attributed to Anṣārī in four categories:

<sup>369</sup> Ḥujwīrī's *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, trans. Nicholson; *Qushayrī's Epistle*, trans. Knysh.

<sup>370</sup> Quoted in Angha, *An Annotated*, 53, from Naṣr Allāh Pūrjavādī, *Isālat-i Ṣad maydān*, 142. Angha notes that Pūrjavādī and Mullāʿī have written extensively on Anṣārī in Persian. Unfortunately, the author does not read Persian and thereby did not have access to this rich literature.

<sup>371</sup> Farhādī, “The Hundred Grounds ...,” *The Heritage*, ed. L. Lewisohn, 387.

<sup>372</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 47 – 55, also Munghal, *Ṣad maydān*, 13 – 14.

<sup>373</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 40.

<sup>374</sup> See Ibn al-Qayyim's *Madārij al-sālikīn*.

- 1) Works on faith, creed, sharī‘a and tafsīr: \**Kashf al-asrār* (Unveiling of the Secrets); *Dhamm al-Kalām* (Condemnation of Speculative Theology); *Takfīr al-Jahmiyya* (The Impiety of the Jahmites); *Arba ‘īn fīl-Sunna* (Forty Traditions); *Arba ‘īn fīl-ṣifāt* (Forty Attribute of God); *Al-farūq fīl- ṣifāt* (The Distinction Between the Attribute of God); *Al-qawā‘id* (The Fundamentals); and *Manāqib Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* (The Excellent virtues of Ibn Ḥanbal).
- 2) Work on Ṣūfism: \**Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya* (The Generations of the Ṣūfis).
- 3) Works on spiritual stages: \**Ṣad maydān* (The Hundred Fields), *Manāzil al-Sā‘irīn* (The Stations of the Wayfarers), *‘Ilal al-Maqāmāt* (The Flaws in the Stages); \**Maqūlāt-o andarz-hā* (Sayings and Advices).
- 4) Works on devotional invocations: \**Munājāt* (Intimate Invocations).<sup>375</sup>

In order to appreciate the variety of Anṣārī’s corpus, it will suffice to sample two works (one in Arabic and the other in Persian), and in the following section expand on four seminal treatises: *‘Ilal al-Maqāmāt*, *Ṣad maydān*, *Manāzil al-sā‘irīn* and the *Munājāt*. Hence, a brief description of *Dhamm al-Kalām wa ahlih* (Condemnation of Speculative Theology and its Practitioners) and *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya* (The Generations of the Ṣūfis) gives us a preliminary sense of the master’s theology and mystical inclinations. First, *Dhamm al-Kalām*, a voluminous book, dictated later in life and undoubtedly the fruit of years of study, experience, struggle and trials.<sup>376</sup> This anti-scholastic polemical treatise in Arabic is divided in two parts with fifteen chapters each. The treatise is composed almost exclusively of ḥādīth, Qur’ānic verses and authoritative citations with long chain of transmission (*isnād*). The master presents his fundamental views on Islamic scholasticism to prove wrong all those who rely on methods of rational philosophy in matter of faith and creed, such as the Jahmites (followers of Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 745)),<sup>377</sup> the Ash‘ārites (followers of Abū ‘l-Ḥasan ibn Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘ārī (d. 935)), and the Mu‘tazila. The master demonstrates that not only the Sunna and the Qur’ān prohibit speculative theology but also

<sup>375</sup> Farhādī. *‘Abdullāh*, 21 - 23; de Beaurecueil’s articles: “al-Anṣārī,” in *EI*, 2<sup>nd</sup> and “‘Abdullāh Anṣārī,” in *EIr*.

<sup>376</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 204 – 221.

<sup>377</sup> See also Anṣārī’s stern refutation of the Jahmites in *Takfīr al-Jahmiyya* (The Impiety of the Jahmites)

imminent scholars of Islam agree as well.<sup>378</sup> A few samples of *Dhamm al-Kalām* give away the content and betrays the master's feelings towards the practitioners of speculative theology. Even though de Beaurecueil's French translation reads better, Farhādī's English one will due for now.

The most outstanding scholars of the Community and the most knowledgeable among the Sunnis (*ahl al-sunnah*) have noticed that from the scholasticism of Jahmites and all that they have borrowed from the Philosophers (*falāsifa*) leads only to denial of the Divine Attributes. It was found that at the center of their creed were the declarations of the atheists (*zanādiqa*) who preceded them, who said: "The celestial sphere (*falak*) is turning and the Heavens are empty. God is everywhere and in everything, and He made no exception (in this regard) between the interior of a dog or a pig and the bowels (of people).

It is not hidden to intelligent people that the earlier and the later scholastic rationalism are like the same thread of women magicians (*khayṭ al-saḥḥāra*). Now, listen, O intelligent ones, to the changes (in the creeds) adopted by the later ones compared to the earlier ones. The earlier ones said – may God make their words disgraceful! – that God is everywhere. The later ones say, "God is nowhere and no place can be attributed to Him." The Messenger of God, the peace and salutation of God be upon him, as quoted by Mu'āwiya b. al-Ḥakam, has said where God is. The adepts of the scholastic rationalism, however say, "He is as much above as below, and one cannot discover where He is. No place can be attributed to Him. He is not in the heavens and He is not on earth." They deny the direction and limit (*ḥadd*). The earlier ones said, "He has no speech, He created speech." The later ones say, He spoke once and is speaking the same speech without interruption, and this speech cannot be found where He is not." Then they say, "He has no place." They say, "He has no voice (*ṣawt*) and no speech (*ḥarf*)." They say (about the Qur'ān): "This is a cover and paper." This is (made of) wool and wood." "The purpose of this writing was (to make) marks (*naqsh*)." "This was for breathing, which is the voice of the reader."...

The Qur'ān is not created, and the one who says it is created is unfaithful.

Such are the snares by which they want to capture the hearts of the common people of the Sunnah. In fact the Jahmite males once, and the Ash'arite females, ten times, expressed their (real) creed, that the "Qur'ān cannot be found anywhere (*ghayr mawjūd*). The Jahmites said, "No attributes!" The Ash'arite said (about some terms in the Qur'ān) "(God's) 'face' (*wajd*) has the same (symbolic) meaning as in (the Arabic expression) 'the face of day,' 'the face of matter,' 'the face of speech.' (God's) 'eyes' (*ayn*) has the same (symbolic) meaning as in (the expression) 'the eyes of enjoyment.' (God's) 'hearing' (*sam*) has the same (symbolic) meaning as in (the expression) 'the wall's ears.' (God's) 'gaze' has the same (symbolic) meaning

<sup>378</sup> See abridged translations: Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 37 - 40; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 204 - 21.

as in (the expression) ‘the two walls gaze at each other.’ They said, “The ‘Footstool’ (*kursī*,) of God, Q.2:255) only means (Divine) ‘Knowledge.’ The ‘Throne’ (‘*arsh*) of God, Q.20:5) only means (Divine) ‘Kingdom’” Then they say, “The person of the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, is not living. After his death, he was no more a conveyor of a message (*muballigh*), and there is no need to go for pilgrimage to his tomb...”

You could not investigate any of their teachings without their (trying to) deceive you, or search into their beliefs without their (trying to) make you collapse into skepticism!<sup>379</sup>

Second, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya* (The Generations of the Ṣūfīs) is the earliest of the Ṣūfī *Ṭabaqāt* genre to have been written in Persian. It contains over two hundred biographies in an overall chronological arrangement and they are grouped together into generation sections.<sup>380</sup> This compilation of notes taken by one of the master’s students lists past prominent Ṣūfīs, some of whom were very dear to the master. De Beaurecueil remarks that

*On y trouve l’expression vivante de son enseignement, des jugements originaux sur ses prédécesseurs, des développements sur les points majeurs de sa doctrine et de précieux extraits de son journal, de ses poèmes et ces Munājāt ...  
Il y reste fidèle à ses procédés coutumiers: images, citations coraniques et attaques contre les le Kalām.*<sup>381</sup>

In his abridged translation of the *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*, Farhādī lays out the motives and goals of the book:

Anṣārī was asked, “what is the benefit to novices of these stories (of the shaykhs)? He replied: ... to learn the sayings of the righteous and the stories of the shaykhs (*pīrān*) and their (spiritual) states (*aḥwāl*) helps the edification (*tarbiyya*) of the novice and increases his strength and resolve. With all that, he gains firmness against the trials of His probations. The novice will be steadfast on the path of poverty (*darwēshī*) and privation (*nā-kāmī*). This will permit him to gain the resolve of men (*mardān*) and to have recourse to the spiritual leader, in order to learn from their behavior and character.”<sup>382</sup>

<sup>379</sup> Farhādī, ‘*Abdullāh*, 38 – 40. De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 204 – 21.

<sup>380</sup> Mojaddedi, *The Biographical*, 70.

<sup>381</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 258.

<sup>382</sup> Farhādī, ‘*Abdullāh*, 45 - 46.

In addition, many believe that the master followed Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī’s (d. 1021) *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*<sup>383</sup> and was also influenced by Abū Nu‘yam Aḥmad b. ‘Abdullāh al-Iṣfahānī’s (d. 1038) *Hilyat al-awliyā’*.<sup>384</sup> Mojaddedi disagrees,

On first impression, the order of biographies seem to follow the generation system of Sulamī’s work. However, a close examination reveals the influence of competing methods of arrangement to an even greater degree than has been observed already in the *Hilyat al-awliyā’*. Most of the biographies appear to be arranged according to two different principles, namely, according to generation and according to the name of the subject.<sup>385</sup>

Unlike Sulamī, the master includes citations, prayers in Herāti, multiple personal reflections and digressions.<sup>386</sup> Mojaddedi explains the content and structure of the Persian *Ṭabaqāt* and draws attention to why Sulamī and Anṣārī shared the same title. He writes:

The Persian *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya* includes six generation sections, the first five of which correspond approximately (in time span) to those structured by Sulamī. Each generation section, apart from the first, is introduced by means of heading, and most biographies begin by classifying the subject as a member of a particular generation. These factors make the generation system the most influential one in the final form of the work, and it is presumably on account of this system that it has been given the same title as Sulamī’s earlier work.<sup>387</sup>

Four centuries later, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 1492) modeled his impressive *Nafaḥāt al-uns* (Intimate Breaths) on the master’s *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*. Jāmī’s *Nafaḥāt* is a collection of approximately 600 biographies, covering the period from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>388</sup>

In terms of content, it is worth noticing Anṣārī’s candid words on behalf of al-Ḥallāj, “I do not approve him but I do not reject him. Do the same (as I do)! Suspend your judgment on him. I like more those who approve him than those who reject him.”<sup>389</sup>

<sup>383</sup> Farhādī, ‘*Abdullāh*, 43 and his translation of a few sections, 44 – 55. See Mojaddedi “Sulamī’s *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*,” in *The Biographical*, 9 – 39.

<sup>384</sup> Mojaddedi, *The Biographical*, 41 – 67.

<sup>385</sup> Mojaddedi, *The Biographical*, 70.

<sup>386</sup> See abridged translation: Farhādī, ‘*Abdullāh*, 43 - 55; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 258 - 73.

<sup>387</sup> Mojaddedi, *The Biographical*, 70 - 71.

<sup>388</sup> Mojaddedi, *The Biographical*, 152.

<sup>389</sup> Quoted in Farhādī, ‘*Abdullāh*, 55; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 270.

Finally, the biographies of two prominent Shaykhs, particularly relevant to Anṣārī, give us a sense of the narrative technique of the Persian *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*:

Abū 'l-'Abbās Qaṣṣāb Āmolī

His name (Shaykh Abū 'l-'Abbās Qaṣṣāb) was Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm. He was the Shaykh of Āmol and Ṭabarīstān, a follower of the school of Aḥmad (ibn Ḥanbal), a leader of this (Ṣūfī) work, a pure Ḥanbilite, a guide (*qibla*), and the chief (spiritual) Helper (*ghwath*) of his time. He said: "This business of ours will go along with Kharaqānī." So he became close to Kharaqānī. He was told that Shaykh Sulamī had written (a book) on the generations (*Ṭabaqāt*) of the (Ṣūfī) shaykhs. He asked, "Has he mentioned my name in it?" They said, "No." He replied, "Then he has done nothing!"

He was kind to the people of Herāt. Many of the shaykhs were like this, for they respected the Herātis. (And it is) right, since the Herātis are cordial (*nēkō-del*) people.

Shaykh Abū 'l-'Abbās was talkative and was rarely silent. Otherwise, he was praying. He was a (spiritual) guide (*qibla*) in this work during his time.

He was still living in my time. Shaykh 'Amū (my teacher) was always saying to me, "It is my wish to pay a visit to three mentors: Shaykh Abū 'l-'Abbās Qaṣṣāb in Āmol, Shaykh Aḥmad Naṣr in Nīshāpūr, and Shaykh Abū 'l-'Alī in Merv." And he said to me, "I shall go there in the spring time (and) I will take you with me." Of course he never did take me (to Āmol) and it was not our lot and destiny. However, people used to come from nearby Āmol to the Ṣūfī convent (Khānaqāh) of Shaykh 'Amū (in Herāt).

The Shaykh al-Islam said: "If Kharaqānī and Muḥammad Qaṣṣāb were both to come back (to life), I would send you (novices) to Muḥammad (Qaṣṣāb), not to Kharaqānī, for he would be more useful to you than Kharaqānī,"— meaning that Kharaqānī was one who has "finished" (*muntahī*—who has reached the final stage of the Ṣūfī path); a novice (*murīd*) would have learned little from him, unless he were a finished one" (himself). And he (Qaṣṣāb) was better for novices.<sup>390</sup>

Sharīf Ḥamza 'Aqīylī

He was in Balkh. He was an ascetic and (a Ṣūfī) possessed extraordinary acts of magnanimity (*karāmāt*). The father of the Shaykh al-Islam (Anṣārī) had years of companionship with him, and held him in the highest respect. Sharīf Ḥamza said, "I was in the Sacred mosque (*Masjid al-Harām*, in Mecca) and I was performing two sections (*rak'at*) of the ritual prayer (*namāz*) in the Station of Abraham (*maqām Ibrāhīm*—near the *Ka'aba*), when Khaḍīr, peace be upon him, appeared and said to me, Ḥamza! Get up and circumambulate (*ṭawāf*—around the *ka'aba*) so that (your two sections of ) the ritual prayers can (also) be performed in Khurāsān!" There are many anecdotes about his (Sharīf Ḥamza's) discernment and perspicacity (*firāsa*) and extraordinary acts of magnanimity (*karāmāt*).

<sup>390</sup> Farhādī, *'Abdullāh*, 52 - 3.

The Shaykh al-Islam (Anṣārī) said, “My father (Abū Manṣūr Anṣārī) served him (*khidmat kard*) for (long) years. When I was born in Herāt, at the time he said in Balkh (to his companion) “Our Abū Manṣūr just had a son, and what a son!”<sup>391</sup>

Finally, with regard to the entire corpus of the master, de Beaurecueil established a comprehensive list which includes both Farhādī’s index and other works.<sup>392</sup> Also, he recognized, however, that there is a persistent authenticity issue surrounding this corpus.

## 1 Authenticity questions

De Beaurecueil and most of Anṣārī’s biographers agree that the master probably never wrote a single book with his own hands.<sup>393</sup> His corpus is largely the notes, and a compilation of his spiritual teachings gathered by his disciples and students. In addition, most of his teaching took place in the intimacy of his *khānqāh* where the master shared his lodge with his disciples and family. De Beaurecueil translated the rules of the master’s *khānqāh* in a little pamphlet entitled, «*Abrégé concernant les bienséances des soufis et de ceux qui cheminent dans la voie de Dieu.*»<sup>394</sup> and he remarks about the rules: «*Elles sont l’expression d’un idéal de loyauté, de fidélité au Coran et à la Sunna, de délicatesse et de discrétion. Dans ce cercle intime, Anṣārī complète l’enseignement spirituel donné au cours des réunions.*»<sup>395</sup> There is no doubt that the master preferred oral delivery of lectures and sermons rather than writing them down. He seems to have excelled in his teaching ability

<sup>391</sup> Farhādī, ‘*Abdullāh*’, 54.

<sup>392</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 164. He lists: *al-Arba ‘ūn fī dalā’ il al-tawḥīd*; *al-Arba ‘ūn fī l-sunna*; *Dhamm al-Kālam wa ahlih*; *al-Farūq fī l-ṣifāt*; *Ilal al-maqāmāt*; *Kanz al-sālikīn yā zād al-‘arīfīn*; \**Kitāb al-qadariyya*; *Kitāb al-qawā’id*; *Manāqib ahl al-āthār*; *Manāqib al-imām Aḥmad*; *Manāzil al-sā’irīn*; *Mokhtaṣar fī ādāb al-Ṣūfīyya wa l-sālikīn li-ṭarīq al-ḥaq*; *Munājāt*; *Naṣīḥat-è Khwāja nizām al-mulk*; *Qaṣīda nūniyya*; *Ṣad maydān*; *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*; *Takfīr al-jahmiyya*. Works marked with \* are in Dari-Persian, the rest in Arabic.

<sup>393</sup> The following authors are all in agreement: de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 137; Angha, *An Annotated*; Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 175; and Bo Utas, “The Munājāt or Ilāhi-Nāmāh of ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī,” *Manuscript of the Middle East* 3 Leiden: Brill, (1998): 83.

<sup>394</sup> De Beaurecueil edited and translated the pamphlet in his biography of the master “*Khwādja*, 310 - 15. Also, see his article, “Un opuscule de Khwādja” *BIFAO* 59 (1960): 203 - 39.

<sup>395</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 120.

and was renowned for his oratorical qualities. Farhādī affirms that “Anṣārī was more a teacher than a penner who wrote. His training as a student and later as a teacher of Traditions (ḥadīth), enhanced by his prodigious memory, enabled him to speak like a book.”<sup>396</sup> The corpus of writings attributed to him, therefore, is the fruit of his disciples’ and students’ notes and collections of his preaching and lectures on spiritual discipline and exercises. Bo Utas best captures the issue; he remarks:

There is, to begin with, no doubt about his existence (...) but did he write anything (i.e. in the narrow sense of the word, excluding the more general sense of ‘compose,’ or ‘formulate’)? That we cannot say. As matter of fact, not one of the works ascribed to him appears to have been written down by himself, and only one of them, his Arabic *Manāzil as-sā’irīn* (Station of the Travelers) is certain to have been dictated by him in a definitive form intended for written transmission. This was furthermore confirmed by his written *ijāzah* (authorization) in at least one of the first manuscripts.<sup>397</sup>

De Beaurecueil notes that in his final years, the master would ask his students to read their notes back to him after his lectures in order to check the accuracy of their collections. Earlier manuscripts of the *Manāzil* were confirmed by the master’s written *ijāza*.<sup>398</sup> De Beaurecueil’s research shows clearly that *Kashf al-Asrār* (Unveiling the Mysteries), *Ṭabaqāt* and *Munājāt* and many other works were compiled and edited by one or more of his disciples and the master dictated *Manāzil* after he lost his sight.<sup>399</sup> The master’s written *ijāza* and an affinity in writing style were important clues which allowed the Dominican friar to piece together the *Munājāt*. In *Manuscrits d’Afghanistan*, de Beaurecueil presents a comprehensive collection of the corpus attributed to the master. These manuscripts are, in

<sup>396</sup> Farhādī, ‘Abdullāh 19.

<sup>397</sup> Bo Utas, “The *Munājāt* or *Ilāhi-Nāmā* of ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī,” *Manuscript of the Middle East* 3 Leiden: Brill, (1998): 83.

<sup>398</sup> Bo Utas, The *Munājāt*,” 83; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 137. He notes, «L’ouvrage était terminé en l’an 475/1082 - 1083, date d’un exemplaire portant authentification et signature de la main même d’Anṣārī.»

<sup>399</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 137; *Chemin*, 39. Concerning the *Manāzil*, de Beaurecueil reports that after the last exile of the master in 1087, he sent a copy of the treatise to his young novice Abū ’l-Najm Miṣbāh in Balkh. The problem is that the manuscript of Herāt and that of Balkh are not entirely identical. There are a number of discrepancies and there is no consensus about which manuscript is more authentic. See de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 142.



his view, largely authentic and reflect the rhetorical style, theological and spiritual teachings of the Pīr-of Herāt.

Farhādī differs and remarks that among the large collection of works attributed to him, the master did not always check systematically the accuracy of his students' notes.<sup>400</sup> This confirms our assumption that due caution is advised in compiling a genuine index of works attributed to the master. Surprisingly, it seems easier for scholars, particularly de Beaurecueil,<sup>401</sup> to write the biography of Anṣārī than his bibliography<sup>402</sup> because the latter is riddled with reliability issues. In addition, many works were falsely attributed to him, and fragments or paraphrases of a particular book are sometimes contained in other manuscripts; the *Munājāt* are a case in point. Farhādī concludes: "In a general way, many parts of the texts found in the 15th century manuscripts can also be traced in earlier manuscripts (such as *Kashf al-Asrār* and *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*.)"<sup>403</sup>

Farhādī believes that two main reasons explain the authenticity problem. First, some writers, calligraphers and scribes attributed works to Anṣārī because he was a famous figure. Second, other writers simply plagiarized or imitated the master's style of writing.<sup>404</sup> Angha remarks that "in reading manuscripts related to him [Anṣārī] we come across repetitions, additions, deletions, and some revisions. Over time and through more research and study, we have come to believe that some works related to him can no longer be considered authentic."<sup>405</sup> Two examples will illustrate the problem. Scholars differ concerning the master's code of Ṣūfī conduct, entitled *Mukhtaṣar fī Ādāb al-Ṣūfīyya*.<sup>406</sup>

<sup>400</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 19. He writes: "Most of his works that are available to us are based on the notes of students and novices, notes which he rarely checked or edited (including the *Manāzil al-sā'irīn*)."

<sup>401</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 15 - 17.

<sup>402</sup> See Helmut Ritter, "Philologica III," *Der Islam* 22, 89 - 100.

<sup>403</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 20.

<sup>404</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 20; De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 4.

<sup>405</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 45. Karamustafa in *Ṣūfism*

<sup>406</sup> Edited and translated by de Beaurecueil «Un opuscule de Kwāja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī concernant les bienseances des Soufis», *BIFAO* 49 (Paris: 1960): 203 – 40. Also de Beaurecueil *Khwādja*, 310 - 15

Angha and Naṣr Allāh Pūrjavādī support Fritz Meier's claim that the book is wrongly attributed to Anṣārī. Meier believes that the real author is the much later but no less famous Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 1221).<sup>407</sup> De Beaurecueil, Karamustafa and Gerhard Böwering disagree with Meier's conclusion. Böwering admits that the master's *Ādāb al-Ṣūfīyya* appears to be very similar to *Ādāb al-murīdīn* ascribed by Meier to Kubrā and the two treatises are identical word for word except for a very few details. However, he insists:

The absence of quotations from sources later than Anṣārī, the complete independence of the work from Abū an-Najīb as-Suhrawardī's *Ādāb al-murīdīn* (hardly explicable in a work by Kubrā, whose Ṣūfī affiliation is commonly traced back to Abū an-Najīb via 'Ammār al-Bidlīsī); the cross-reference to Anṣārī's *Manāzil as-Sā'irīn* within the work; the strong plea for Sunni attitudes in the Ṣūfī master that is consistent with the fervent Ḥanbalī trend of Anṣārī, yet hardly compatible with the Shiite leanings of certain Kubrāwīs; and finally the conformity of the treatise with the thought and style of Anṣārī, all suggest that the work was compiled by a direct disciple of Anṣārī and later plagiarized either by Kubrā himself or one of Kubrā's early followers.<sup>408</sup>

Similarly, the only surviving manuscript of *Kashf al-asrār* is Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī's (d. c. 1126) commentary based on Anṣārī's and not the master's own *Kashf al-asrār*.<sup>409</sup> Indeed, almost forty years after the death of the master, Maybudī compiled, edited and extended the

<sup>407</sup> Fritz Meier, *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, trans. John O'Kane (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 55. According to Angha, Pūrjavādī follows Meier's lead in this issue. She cites: Naṣrollah Pūrjavādī, *Isālat-i Ṣad maydān*. See Angha, *An Annotated*, 45.

<sup>408</sup> Gerhard Böwering, "The Adab Literature of Classical Ṣūfism: Anṣārī's Code of Conduct," in *Moral Conduct and Authority*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf, 70. Karamustafa remarks that *Mukhtaṣar fī Ādāb al-Ṣūfīyya* or *Ādāb al-murīdīn* is probably the work of a disciple of Anṣārī, but falsely attributed to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā. *Ṣūfism*, 86. De Beaurecueil has always attributed *Mukhtaṣar fī Ādāb al-Ṣūfīyya* to the master. Nowhere does it express any doubt. Also see *Ādāb al-murīdīn* (*A Ṣūfī Rule for Novices*) trans Menahem Milson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); Mirijan. Molé, «Les Kubrāwīya entre sunnisme et shiisme aux huitième et neuvième siècles de l'Hégire,» *REI* (1961) 61 - 142.

<sup>409</sup> Keeler follows 'Alī Aṣghar Hikmat's study in *Kashf al-asrār*, known as tafsīr of khvāja 'Abdu'llāh Anṣārī, which found that *Kashf al-asrār* was Maybudī's commentary based on Anṣārī's work. Keeler writes, "*Kashf al-asrār* is based upon and embodies the only surviving text of the mystical commentary on the Qur'ān by the well known Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī, " 'Abd Allāh Anṣārī of Herāt" in *Ṣūfī Hermeneutics: The Qur'ān Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20. This book is from *Persian Ṣūfism and Exegesis: Maybudī's Commentary on the Qur'ān*, *The Kashf al-asrār* (PhD dissertation, Cambridge University, Faculty of Oriental Studies, 2001). also, see Keeler's articles: "Exegesis iii. In Persian," and "Maybudī, Abū'l-Faḍl Rashīd-al-Dīn." in *Eir*. (online)

lecture notes written down by the master's pupils on his Qur'ānic commentaries. According to Bo Utas,

Maybudī claims that he has read (*tāla 'tu*) the *Kitāb Shaix al-islam* ... 'Abda'llāh ... Anṣārī (*qaddasa 'llāhu rūhahu*) *fī tafsīr al- Qur'ān*, finding it a wonder of expression and meaning, of ornate and rhythmic prose (*tarsī'*), but also extremely concise, thus deciding to amplify it. And amplify it he did. It fills ten solid volumes in the edition of 'Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat.<sup>410</sup>

Still, in a paper published at the millennium lunar anniversary of the master's birthday, de Beaurecueil laments the behavior of a number of scholars who continue to attribute to the master works that are obviously not his.<sup>411</sup>

In addition to the authenticity problem, Farhādī and Angha are in disagreement concerning the kind of Persian dialect that the master used during his teachings. In the case of *Ṣad maydān*, Farhādī holds that the book was dictated in Dari-Persian while Angha demonstrates that it was in Herāti-Persian.<sup>412</sup> On the language issue, Wladimir Ivanov's article "Ṭabaqāt of Anṣārī in the Old Language of Herāt" is very insightful and has attracted the attention of some scholars. This article is a meticulous philological analysis of a manuscript of Anṣārī's *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*. His analysis traces the language of the manuscript back to 11<sup>th</sup> century Herāti. The author borrows the expression "the Old Language of Herāt" from Jāmī's introduction in his *Nafaḥāt* in reference to the 11<sup>th</sup>

<sup>410</sup> Bo Utas, «The *Munājāt*,» 84; also, Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 27.

<sup>411</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Le millénaire lunaire de la naissance de Khwāja 'Abdollah Anṣārī Harawī», *MIDEO* 13 (1977): 314.

<sup>412</sup> According to Farhādī *Kashf al-asrār*, was dictated in Dari-Persian but Angha differs with Farhādī. She offers a perceptive remark on the language issue about Persian dialects. She notes: "*Ṣad maydān* is written in the Heri dialect [herāti] that sprang from the Pahlavi language, itself an offspring of Old Persian. The present Persian language is one of the dialects of Old Persian, the language spoken over two thousand years ago in the Persian Empire that extended from east of the present-day Iraq to Punjab and west India. . The Pahlavi language had two different dialects: the northern Pahlavi (common to Khurāsān and Azerbaijan), and the southern Pahlavi (common in Farsi, central Persia). The southern dialect became a common language in Persia during the Sāsānian empire. There were (still are) other dialects in Persia, such as Farsi, Dari, Kurdi, and Heri. Heri was mainly spoken in Herāt and is the dialect used in *Ṣad maydān*, and Dari originated from Pahlavi language and was common during the Sāsānian period, and especially in the Khurāsān. Her footnote on the development of the Persian language and its dialects is based on Muḥammad Taqī Bahār's *Sabkshināsi* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1380/2001), vol. 2, i-iv). in *An Annotated*, 53 - 54.

century dialect of the city of Herāt.<sup>413</sup> De Beaurecueil, Farhādī, and Angha, however, all agree that the preface to *Ṣad maydān* which reads “*Tarājim-i-Majālis-i ‘aqīda* (Introductory notes to lectures concerning the articles of faith)”<sup>414</sup> does not mean that the book was first written in Arabic and then translated in Persian. The word *tarājim* has to be understood as “records, expositions” and not as “translation.”<sup>415</sup> On his part, de Beaurecueil refers simply to the master’s Persian dialect without specifying which particular dialect was used. He is more interested in the significance of Anṣārī’s decision to use the vernacular than the type of dialect used. He writes:

*Le persan était la langue commune des habitants de Hérat, celle qu’Anṣārī parlait avec ses disciples et dans laquelle il s’exprimait naturellement lorsqu’il s’adressait à Dieu (Oraisons). Langue familière et poétique, non technique, se prêtant aux explications à la portée de tout venant et aux effusions chaleureuses du cœur. L’arabe au contraire était la langue sacrée du Coran, celle des sciences religieuses y compris le soufisme, avec leur vocabulaire technique, celle de la précision de la pensée et de la communication entre lettrés d’un bout à l’autre du monde musulman, à quelque ethnie qu’ils appartiennent. C’est dire que dans Les Cent Terrains Anṣārī s’adresse à son entourage, alors que dans Les Etapes et Les Déficiences le public est beaucoup plus large, «gens de Hérat et d’ailleurs» nous dit-il. Des définitions précises y remplaceront la simple traduction ou l’explication succincte des termes arabes. Des analyses subtiles, où chaque mot à sa valeur, y succéderont à des descriptions ou à des comparaisons plus libres, manquant souvent de rigueur.*<sup>416</sup>

Another issue is that over time many versions of works attributed to Anṣārī were discovered, such as several versions of *‘Ilāhī nāma*, *Munājāt*, *Ṣad maydān*, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*. Also, multiple versions of his sayings, poems and manuscripts are scattered all over the Persian and Arabic world. De Beaurecueil worked on manuscripts located in Kabul, Bombay, London, Paris, Tehran and Istanbul.<sup>417</sup> In his series of *Anṣārīyyāt*

<sup>413</sup> Wladimir. Ivanov, “Ṭabaqāt of Anṣārī in the Old Language of Herāt.” *JRAS* (1923): 1 - 34; 337 - 382; and Mojaddedi, *The Biographical*, 70.

<sup>414</sup> The writer follows Farhādī’s transliteration and translation. See his article in *The Heritage*, ed., Lewisohn, 387.

<sup>415</sup> Farhādī, *‘Abdullāh*, 59; Angha, *An Annotated*, 55 - 56 ; and de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 37.

<sup>416</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 37 - 38.

<sup>417</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Une ébauche persane ... », *Mélanges Islamologiques BIFAO*, 3 - 4.

published in the *BIFAO*, he devoted an article to the question of manuscripts. Painstakingly, he went through all the manuscripts available at the time and evaluated their authenticity and relevance. His article shows how dexterous and skillful he had become in editing manuscripts.<sup>418</sup> It is no wonder that when de Beaurecueil opened his *Maison d'Abraham* in Kabul and gave up hunting and editing manuscripts, his Dominican brother Georges Anawati and many of his colleagues thought it was a waste of talents and a loss of erudite scholarship on Anṣārī's work.<sup>419</sup>

At any rate, de Beaurecueil's scholarship has sought to sort out the authenticity question and arrive at a reliable catalog of books attributed to the master. His annotated and translated works have largely cleared the confusion. Apart from some minor mistakes in his early bibliography of Anṣārī, de Beaurecueil gives readers an appendix of accurate works, including poems and sayings.<sup>420</sup> On that note, de Beaurecueil recalled Hellmut Ritter's observation: «*Un travail comme celui-ci, il faut l'avoir fait une fois dans sa vie. Cela prend tant de temps, cela coûte tant de peine, que l'on n'est point tenté de recommencer. Mais on est désormais capable de comprendre les difficultés de ceux qui, à leur tour, s'y essaient.*»<sup>421</sup> A clear example of de Beaurecueil's investment is best appreciated in his *Manuscrits d'Afghanistan* published in 1964, which was the fruit of two visits to Afghanistan. The first visit to Kabul and Herāt in 1955 - 56 and the second in September 1962.<sup>422</sup> During both visits de Beaurecueil collected 1,596 manuscripts from the King M.

<sup>418</sup> «*Anṣārīyyāt: 'Abdullāh Anṣārī al-Harawī (396 - 481/ 1006 - 1089). Les étapes des itinérants vers Dieu,*» *BIFAO*, 1 - 181. The introduction of this translation deals with the following : *Relevé et description des manuscrits; Les chaînes de transmission; La tradition manuscrite et les commentaires; Manuscrits composites; Prototypes et familles de manuscrits; Essai d'une histoire de la tradition textuelle*. It is an erudite work which is the fruit of seventeen years of research at the IDEO in Cairo.

<sup>419</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 125. Avon, *Les frères*, 446.

<sup>420</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 172 - 315 (Part II).

<sup>421</sup> Quoted in De Beaurecueil, *Présentation d'Anṣārī*, *MIDEO* 11 (1972): 291 - 300. (Ritter compiled a bibliography of the master in *Philologika* VIII/1: Anṣārī Herewī - Senā'ī Gaznewī." *Der Islam* 22/2, 89 - 100.

<sup>422</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Manuscrits d'Afghanistan*, (Le Caire: IFAO, 1964). See also, *MIDEO* 3, (1956): 75 - 206.

Zāher Shāh's private library and from five other public libraries, namely, Kabul Museum, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of public education, Herāt Museum and the faculty of fine arts of the University of Kabul.<sup>423</sup> This overview of the body of work attributed to Anṣārī demonstrates the place that the master holds in the mystical tradition and imagination of the Persian world. Let us turn to a few authentic masterpieces attributed to the Pīr of Herāt in order to appreciate their spiritual acumen.

## *II Three Spiritual Treatises*

Beginners on the spiritual path are often in dire need of precise and well-defined stages and stations. It comes as no surprise that in the mystical tradition of Islam, there are many works which try to answer such needs.<sup>424</sup> The three treatises under consideration fall squarely within this purview. The Pīr of Herāt was not a theoretician of the mystical path but one who lived it and taught students and novices the stages and pitfalls of the spiritual journey. The form, the content and the spiritual doctrines of the master's treatises were mostly influenced by the writings of Abū Sa'īd Kharrāz's (d. 899) *Kitāb al-ṣidq* (The Book of Spiritual Authenticity), and Abū Manṣūr al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 1107) *Risāla nahj al-khāṣṣ* (Path of the Privileged). But among these masters, de Beaurecueil and Farhādī believe that the most influential work on Anṣārī was Abū Manṣūr al-Iṣfahānī's work.<sup>425</sup> Indeed, in his

<sup>423</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Manuscripts*, vii - xiii

<sup>424</sup> Karamustafa, *Ṣūfism*, 84 - 87. The author offers a list of major Ṣūfī manuals and bibliographical compilations from the fourth and fifth/tenth and eleventh centuries. To name but a few: Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj's (d. 988) *Kitāb al-luma' fi'l-taṣawwuf* (The Book of the Light Flashes), Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī's (d. 990s) *al-Ta'arruf li-madhab ahl al-taṣawwuf* (Introduction to the Way of the People of Ṣūfism), Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 1038) *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'* (The Ornament of God's Friends and Generations of the Pure Ones). This list is relevant to our study because these treatises are contemporary to Anṣārī. In addition to Karamustafa's list, *Risālāt nahj al-khāṣṣ* (Path of the Elects) by Abū Manṣūr al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1107) directly influenced the Pīr of Herāt. A century later, *Ādāb al-murīdīn* (The Etiquettes of Disciples) by Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 1126) is also a seminal work in this area.

<sup>425</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 53; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 53; see also de Beaurecueil's edition of *Risāla nahj al-khāṣṣ*, in de Beaurecueil, «La voie du privilégie; petit traité d'Abū Manṣūr al-Iṣfahānī,» *Mélanges Taha Hussein*, Le Caire, 1962, 46 - 76.

*Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*, the master speaks highly of al-Iṣfahānī, calling him “the Imām of the esoteric sciences and the sciences of divine reality, the paragon of his age, unique among Masters.”<sup>426</sup> His biography reads:

Abū Manṣūr Mu‘ammar b. Aḥmad al-Iṣfahānī was the Shaykh of Iṣfahān, a descendent of the Prophet (*sayyid*), a leader (*imām*) in the knowledge of the outward (*ẓāhir*) and the knowledge of (spiritual) realities, unequaled among the shaykhs of his time, a Ḥanbalite, and a Sunnī.”

The Shaykh al-Islam, (Anṣārī) said, “No one has described the (spiritual) stages and stations (*maqāmāt*) better than him [al-Iṣfahānī]. Many (others) relate stories and anecdotes (*ḥikāyāt*) but the words of Ṣūfī must be said on the basis of finding (*wujūd*), spiritual ‘taste’ (*dhawq*) and direct vision (*didār*) and not on the basis of anecdotes.

Abū Manṣūr al-Iṣfahānī had an eminent language. He is the author of books: The Path of the Elect (*Nahj al-Khāṣṣ*), Forty (Traditions) for Ṣūfīs –an outstanding manual, and the book of Exile (*Ghurbat*). In the book of Exile, he quotes a man who said: “I found those who reached the farthest states (*aṣḥāb al-ghāyāt*) in these (Ṣūfī) matters (*amr*) who are withdrawn (*ifrād* –from worldly affairs) ...

The Shaykh al-Islam said, “Abū Manṣūr Mu‘ammar al-Iṣfahānī said: ‘It is wrong to make comparison (of common people) to the Prophet, because the common people are going toward temptation (*fitna*) while they (the Prophets) are (going) toward protection (‘*iṣmat* –from sin).’<sup>427</sup>

The master, also, refers explicitly to other seminal Ṣūfī authors such as: ‘Ubayd al-Baṣrī (d. 761), Dhū l-Nūn Miṣrī (d. 860), Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī (d. 874)<sup>428</sup>, Junayd Baghdādī (d. 910), and Abū Bakr al-Kattānī (d. 934).<sup>429</sup>

Anṣārī sought to systematize the mystical journey. Even though these three treatises differ in terms of language (Persian and Arabic), literary genre, the circumstances and period of composition, and the extent of their influence, they, nevertheless, shed light on each other. Thus, it is crucial to compare them in order to grasp their spiritual intelligence. In these spiritual teachings, the master addressed morality (*akhlāq*) and good conduct

<sup>426</sup> Farhādī, “The Hundred Grounds ...,” *The Heritage*, ed., Lewisohn, 391 - 92; and Farhādī, ‘*Abdullāh*, 53; de Beaurecueil, «La voie du privilégie; petit traité d’Abū Manṣūr al-Iṣfahānī,» *Mélanges Taha Hussein*, 46 - 76.

<sup>427</sup> Farhādī, ‘*Abdullāh*, 53.

<sup>428</sup> Also included in his Persian *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*, de Beaurecueil, *Khawādjā*, 264 – 65.

<sup>429</sup> See the preface of *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil*, de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 83 - 85 and 153 - 58.

(*adab*) as well as chivalry (*futuwwa*) and magnanimity (*muruwwa*).<sup>430</sup> He underscored spiritual discipline and devotion and above all a strict respect to the divine path. As a Ṣūfī and a Ḥanbalī in theology,<sup>431</sup> Anṣārī relies only on the Qur’ān and the Sunna; and as a literary genius, he weaves verses of the Qur’ān and ḥadīths together in order to craft a mosaic of rhymed and rhythmic prose, beautiful to recite and easy to remember. Hence, the references to the sacred book and the prophetic tradition are not epiphenomena but they confer religious value and authenticity to his thought.<sup>432</sup> In the preface of *Manāzil*, the master goes through the entire chain of transmission (*isnād*) of a number of ḥadīth cited to prove the dependability and reliability of his sources.<sup>433</sup> Likewise his spirituality is based on the sacred texts. Angha makes an astute remark concerning the master’s view on the relationship between Ṣūfism and Sharī’ah:

To him the divine law is the foundation of understanding and awareness of the divine truth, and the divine truth is expressed in the divine law, and the seeker is to understand and obey both on the path towards understanding the reality of God. His Ḥanbalism and his devotion to the Qur’ān and ḥadīth is expressed in every detail of his teachings, and his mystical teachings are also expressed in every detail of *Ṣad maydān* ; they exist not in opposition to each other but in harmony.”<sup>434</sup>

Similarly, de Beaurecueil in his «*Présentation d’Anṣārī*, » notes:

<sup>430</sup> According to Angha, *Muruwwa* literary means ‘manliness’ but may also be rendered as ‘being just and fair, having compassion, being benevolent.’ For Anṣārī, *muruwwa* is living and standing for oneself and one’s convictions. Like the Q. 3:18 commands: “... and those with knowledge to stand firm for justice ...” *An Annotated*, 68. See also Seyyed Hossein Naṣr “The Rise and Development of Persian Ṣūfism” in *The Heritage*, ed. Lewisohn, 1 - 18. In this article Naṣr reviews major aspects of early Persian Ṣūfism and gives succinct explanations of concepts such as *shaṭḥ* (theophanic locutions or ecstatic sayings), ethics, divine love, chivalry etc. See in the same collection, Muḥammad Ja‘far Maḥjūb, “Chivalry and Early Persian Ṣūfism,” *The Heritage*, ed. Lewisohn, 549 - 582. Chivalry (*futuwwa*) according to Naṣr “is best translated as ‘spiritual chivalry’” in *The Heritage*, ed., Lewisohn, 9. According to Nurbakhsh, *futuwwa* means “putting others before oneself in this world and the hereafter,” in *Ṣūfī Symbolism*, Vol. X, 90. In his introduction to *The Heritage*, he writes, spiritual chivalry means “the performance of altruistic service to others while remaining free of any self-consciousness with respect to the value of the service.” xxxii.

<sup>431</sup> *Ṣad maydān*, trans Mughal, 18. On that note, Farḥādī seems unimpressed by Mughal’s translation and raises major objections regarding its “accuracy and fidelity to the Persian original.” Farḥādī, *The Heritage*, ed., Lewisohn, 387, footnote, 13.

<sup>432</sup> De Beaurecueil, “Les Références bibliques de l’itinéraire spirituel chez ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī (Ve/XIe s.),” *MIDEO*, 1, 9 - 38.

<sup>433</sup> De Beaurecueil’s translation in *Chemin*, 156 - 157.

<sup>434</sup> Angha, *An annotated*, 45.



... chez Anṣārī, entre le Ḥanbalīte et le Soufī, aucune duplicité, aucun conflit intérieur. Jouant du paradoxe je serai tenté de dire: il fut Ḥanbalīte parce que Soufī et Soufī parce que Ḥanbalīte. Ces deux aspects de sa personnalité interférant continuellement, sa vie et ses œuvres en font foi.<sup>435</sup>

The spiritual life and the mystical experience go hand in hand with the observation of the demands of the religion. For Anṣārī, Ṣūfism is Islam lived more deeply and a good Muslim should be a Ṣūfī and a Ṣūfī should be a good Muslim. He teaches: “ The Reality is entirely the Law. The Law is the foundation of the Reality. The Law without the Reality is useless, and the Reality without the Law is useless. Those who act without these two are (themselves) useless.”<sup>436</sup>

At the outset, it is important to note that de Beaurecueil’s scholarship on the master’s work went hand in hand with a subtle spiritual conversation. First of all, he published many articles concerning key mystical states and aspects of the spiritual life, all based upon the master’s treatises.<sup>437</sup> These articles were occasions of conversation, debates and contention over doctrinal issues, such as the return to God, the love of God, hope, spiritual poverty, concerning their faith traditions. De Beaurecueil often proposes a parallel reading of the master’s thought and Christian texts or views. For instance, in «*La place du prochain dans la vie spirituelle*», he examines the evolution of the master’s thought in *Ṣad*

<sup>435</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Présentation d’Anṣārī» *MIDEO* 11 (1972): 295. On this note, Laoust, Makdisi, Massignon, Bell and Hurvitz are in agreement with Angha and de Beaurecueil concerning Ḥanbalī spirituality.

<sup>436</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 41.

<sup>437</sup> The following articles are all based on the master’s spiritual thought: «La place du prochain dans la vie spirituelle d’après Anṣārī,» *MIDEO*, no. 2, 5 - 70; «La pauvreté, attitude essentielle de l’homme face à Dieu, d’après Anṣārī,» Roma 17 - 23 Aprile 1955, *Pubblicati col concorso delle Giunta centrale per gli studi storici e dell’ Unesco*, 441 - 443; «Pauvreté et vie spirituelle chez Anṣārī,» *Les Mardis de Dar al-Salām*, 65 - 81; «Les références bibliques de l’itinéraire spirituel chez Anṣārī,» *MIDEO* 1 (1954): 9 - 38; «Autour d’un texte d’Anṣārī: la problématique musulmane de l’espérance,» *Revue Thomiste*, no. 2, 339 - 366; «Le retour à Dieu (*tawba*) élément essentiel de la conversation chez Anṣārī,» *MIDEO* 6 (1959 - 61): 55 - 122; «L’aspiration (*Raghba*), rectification de l’espérance selon Anṣārī,» *MIDEO* 7 (1963): 1 - 20; «La souffrance, mère de la joie?» *Vie Spirituelle*, no. 697, 485 - 97; «A l’école des sept dormants: la ‘futuwwa’ chez Anṣārī,» *En hommage*, 49 - 60; «Mémoire de l’homme ou mémoire de Dieu. Le *dhikr* chez Anṣārī,» *MIDEO* 22 (1995): 73 - 94; «L’Amour de Dieu chez Anṣārī,» *MIDEO* 6 (1959 - 61): 55 - 122; and «Le langage imagé du *Livre des étapes*», *Mélanges offerts à Henri Laoust, Bulletin d’études orientales*, (Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1978), 33 - 44.

*maydān* and *Manāzil*. He remarks that according to the master the other could be a help and also a hindrance on the disciple's journey. In fact, the other must ultimately disappear because the focus of the spiritual journey is God alone and his commands. A crucial question comes up, however, could Christians and Jews be the other to the novices or do only their fellow Muslims count? The answer is:

*Mais quel est le prochain auquel le novice porte autant d'intérêt et vers lequel certains parfaits se trouvent ramenés vers Dieu? Une étude minutieuse des termes qui les désignent et de leur contexte permet d'aboutir à la conclusion suivante: il s'agit normalement et presque uniquement des musulmans, à l'exclusion des infidèles (kuffār) envers lesquels la seule attitude convenable est la guerre sainte, les protégés (ahl al-dhimma) ayant le droit à un peu plus de douceur et de considération (on acceptera par exemple de leur donner des conseils s'ils les sollicitent).<sup>438</sup>*

Another example is found in «*Les références bibliques de l'itinéraire spirituel chez 'Abdullāh Anṣārī.*»<sup>439</sup> De Beaurecueil analyzes the master's use of two biblical figures: Moses and Abraham.<sup>440</sup> He shows how a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī uses biblical figures from the Qur'ān as prototype of the wayfarers. He writes:

*C'est donc vers Abraham et vers Moïse qu'Anṣārī porte ses regards, lorsque l'évolution de son expérience et de sa doctrine lui fait chercher dans le Coran les exemples d'une vie spirituelle proprement mystique et concrètement vécue. Sans le savoir, il dépasse ainsi le Coran et s'abreuve aux sources de l'Ancien Testament.<sup>441</sup>*

If Massignon's work on the origin of Ṣūfism proved that the Qur'ān and the Sunna were the primary sources of Ṣūfism and its technical lexicon,<sup>442</sup> de Beaurecueil's article raises a

<sup>438</sup> De Beaurecueil, «La place du prochain dans la vie spirituelle d'après Anṣārī,» *MIDEO* 2 (1955): 69.

<sup>439</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Les références bibliques ... , » *MIDEO* 1(1954): 9 - 38.

<sup>440</sup> Under the title "Prologomenon: Prophets in the Qur'ān and Ṣūfī Exegesis," Keeler explores the esoteric hermeneutic of three prophets: Abraham, Moïses and Joseph, in *Ṣūfī*, 209 - 310.

<sup>441</sup> De Beaurecueil, «La place du prochain dans la vie spirituelle d'après Anṣārī,» *MIDEO* 2 (1955): 69.

<sup>442</sup> Louis Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1954), 63 - 64, and 104. He writes in this seminal essay, "It is from the Qur'ān , constantly recited, meditated, and practiced, that Muslim mysticism proceeds, in its origins and its developments." See also Gude, *Louis Massignon*, 113. Gude writes: "Basing his assertions on a philological analysis and writings, Massignon asserted that Ṣūfī mysticism could be traced back to the Qur'ān ... As a result, Ṣūfism was integral both to the growth of Islam and the development of the Arabic language. The early mystics interiorized the vocabulary of the Qur'ān by making it part of their daily cultic practices." Anṣārī's works testify to and vindicate Massignon's intuition. See also, Karamustafa's *Ṣūfism*, and Schimmel's *Mystical*.

different question: «*Notre étude pose maintenant la question de l'influence non plus extérieure mais intérieure de la révélation judéo-Chrétienne sur l'élaboration de la mystique en Islam.*»<sup>443</sup> His arresting conclusion brings to completion Massignon's seminal intuition:

*Pour le théologien Chrétien, le problème n'est plus seulement celui de la possibilité d'une mystique authentique hors de la foi au Christ Sauveur, mystique naturelle ou surnaturelle, mais aussi celui d'une mystique 'de l'extérieur', s'alimentant indirectement à la révélation judéo-Chrétienne, surtout aux faits majeur de l'Ancien Testament.*<sup>444</sup>

Furthermore, de Beaurecueil's attachment and reverence for the master lie primarily in the following remarks. Anṣārī's mystical thought and spiritual teachings sought to strike a healthy tension between a strict respect for the Qur'ān and the Sunna on the one hand, and their inner meaning (*istinbat*) on the other. In his *Kashf al-asrār*, Maybudī tried to bring together the exoteric and esoteric exegesis of the Qur'ān already present in the master's commentary.<sup>445</sup> On this note, it is important to remark that commentators of Anṣārī's works are multiple and varied. The master's admirers are found among both Ibn 'Arabī's as well as Ibn Taymiyya's students.<sup>446</sup> In both *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil*, Anṣārī is aware of the differences in aptitude and varying dispositions of his students. He teaches his disciples to

<sup>443</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Les références bibliques de l'itinéraire spirituel chez Anṣārī,» *MIDEO* 1 (1954): 38.

<sup>444</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Les références bibliques de l'itinéraire spirituel chez Anṣārī,» *MIDEO* 1 (1954): 38.

<sup>445</sup> Keeler, *Ṣūfī Hermeneutics*, 10.

<sup>446</sup> In his article "La structure du Livre des Étapes," *MIDEO* 11 (1972): 80 - 91; and *Chemin*, 47 - 55, de Beaurecueil scrutinizes the work of twelve commentators of the *Manāzil*. We will comment on the commentators later but suffice it to say for the moment that Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī, on one hand, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, on the other, are good examples in each school. Even though Ibn Qayyim does not agree with the structure and organization of the stations, his voluminous work *Madārīj al-sālikīn* is a rearrangement and a commentary of the master's *Manāzil*. De Beaurecueil's comment on Ibn Qayyim's interpretation is worth mentioning, «Seul Ibn Qayyim critique, à tort ou à raison mais en tout cas avec courage. Comme il le dit lui-même quelque part dans son gros commentaire, s'il aime beaucoup Anṣārī, il aime davantage encore la vérité.» See also, Joseph N. Bell, *Love Theory* (Albany: State University of New York: 1979), 93 – 98. De Beaurecueil writes about *Manāzil*, «La réussite de l'oeuvre se manifeste par l'abondance des commentateurs qui s'attachèrent par la suite à en mettre en lumière les moindres détails. Ittiḥādiyya et Shuhūdiyya se la disputèrent et se réclamèrent du maître qui l'avait écrite. Dans l'état actuel des connaissances bibliographiques, on connaît dix-huit commentaires du *Manāzil*, dont deux seulement, de tendances opposées, ont été publiés jusqu'ici, ceux de Kāshānī et d'Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. See de Beaurecueil, «Une ébauche persane des *Manāzil as-sā'irīn*: le «Kitāb-e-Ṣad maydān» *BIFAO*, vol. 2, 1 - 27.

grow in spiritual matters step by step. His methodology is not new, but his poetic style makes the stages easy to memorize.

De Beaurecueil was not only a scholar of Anṣārī's work, he was also a student and disciple of the master's mystical intuitions. He did not hesitate to incorporate parts of the master's aphorisms, sayings and poems into his own liturgical worship. His liturgical celebration (Eucharist and the Hours) in Kabul features many sayings of the *Munājāt*. These aphorisms or monologues to God nourished his spiritual imagination and helped shape his daily *horarium*. Also, the exquisite Herati dialect delighted him particularly, and it is no wonder that his French translation is, in our view, the best rendering so far. Concerning *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil*, they served as stages or dwelling places on the spiritual journey. In so many ways, de Beaurecueil's endeavor is comparable to the work of an iconographer in Orthodox Christian tradition. Painting an icon was not just an act of art but a prayer. This master-teacher conversation was the nourishing ground upon which the Dominican friar's life as a religious and a priest rested in the land of Islam. He seemed to have reconciled his Dominican spirituality of *contemplate alias tradera* (contemplate and share the fruit of one's contemplation) with the master's spiritual vision. It is no surprise that the *Munājāt* were at his bedside in his final days in France. De Beaurecueil's work offered a systematic reading of the master's spiritual thought. The three treatises that are the subject of our study are famous for their insight, style and spiritual wisdom. We start with the last and the shortest of the three treatises and later offer a comparative study of *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil* for a greater appreciation of the master's thought.

## 1 *Kitāb ‘īlal al-maqāmāt (The Flaws in the Stages)*

“The Flaws in the Stages” is a farewell treatise dictated by the master a short time before his death to his faithful disciple ‘Abd al-Malik al-Karūkhī (d. 1154)<sup>447</sup>. It was dictated after *Manāzil* and meant to warn students about the perils of the spiritual journey. In his *Appendices to the Generations of Ḥanbalītes (Dhayl ‘alā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila)*, Ibn Rajab al-Baghdādī’s (d. 1393) attributed *‘Ilal al-maqāmāt* to Anṣārī,<sup>448</sup> and the manuscript on which de Beaurecueil worked contained an authentic chain of transmission of the book from the master to Abū ‘l-Faṭḥ ‘Abd al-Malik al-Karūkhī (d. 1154), his faithful disciple. The surviving available manuscript dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup><sup>449</sup> and, according to de Beaurecueil, is readable and in a very good shape.<sup>450</sup> There is no doubt that the treatise is part of the master’s teaching corpus, but, *‘Ilal al-maqāmāt*, unlike the other two treatises, has had a limited circulation. De Beaurecueil remarks, however, that «*‘Ilal al-maqāmāt connut très vite une lointaine diffusion, comme le prouve son utilisation par le soufi Andalou Ibn al-‘Arīf (d. 536/ 1141), qui en fit la trame de ses Beautés des Réunions (Maḥāsīn al-majālis)*»<sup>451</sup>

The real roots of the treatise lie in a previous remark made in the last chapter of the *Manāzil*, «*Tout ce qui existe en dehors d’elle (l’Unification), en fait d’états et de demeures, est accompagné de déficiences.*»<sup>452</sup> The master starts his treatise with a warning: “This is the mentioning of some flaws that occur in the stages and which remain from the attention

<sup>447</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 77.

<sup>448</sup> Ibn Rajab al-Baghdādī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, ed. H. Laoust and S. Dahan, Damas, t. 1, 66 - 84.

<sup>449</sup> De Beaurecueil’s footnotes refer to *La Bibliothèque Nationale de Vienne*, n.1891, fol.61a 65b. See *Chemin*, 248.

<sup>450</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Un petit traité de ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī», *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, 153 - 4. The first two pages of the article show clearly that this short treatise belongs to the corpus attributed to the master.

<sup>451</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 77. Farhādī, ‘*Abdullāh*, 93.

<sup>452</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 77.

of the novice (*murīd*) who is a beginner (*mubtadī*).<sup>453</sup> In terms of style and structure, the treatise resembles *Manāzil*, as de Beaurecueil notes, «*Au point de vue style, on retrouve, bien qu'avec moins de rigueur que dans les Manāzil, la concision d'Anṣārī, son amour des trilogies et son penchant pour les assonances, de même que son souci d'appuyer sa doctrine sur des citations du Coran.*»<sup>454</sup>

The master's teachings focus on inherent deficiencies proper to each spiritual stage. Two questions are raised: what are the deficiencies, and what is the destiny of the ten stages in the path of the privileged?<sup>455</sup> Ten chapters answer these questions and each one refers to one of the hundred stages in the *Manāzil*. The ten chapters are: *irāda* (will), *zuhd* (renunciation), *tawakkul* (absolute reliance on God's providence), *ṣabr* (patience), *ḥuzn* (sadness), *khawf* (fear), *rajā'* (hope), *shukr* (gratitude), *maḥabba* (love), *shawq* (longing). The treatise's description of the stages simply confirms and clarifies the master's teachings on spiritual progress, but the concluding remarks summarize all the ten stages. As in *Ṣad maydān*, where all the hundred fields dissolve in the field of love, in *ʿIlal al maqāmāt* the master ends with an exposé on *ṭarīq al-khāṣṣ* (path of the privileged). The final paragraph epitomizes his thought and de Beaurecueil observes, «*On y constate le triomphe définitif du ṭawhīd, témoin cette conclusion qui semble dépasser la doctrine du Livre des Étapes.*»<sup>456</sup>

The stage of love and the way of the privileged read as follows:

*maḥabba*

*L'amour du serviteur pour son Seigneur consiste pour le serviteur à se présenter devant la puissance de son Maître. Dans la voie du Commun des Gens, il est le soutien de la foi; dans la voie du Privilegié, il est la déficience de l'anéantissement. C'est en effet grâce à lui que le Commun des Gens s'acquie du service [de Dieu] et supporte l'épreuve, alors que, dans la voie de Privilegié, toute prétendue oeuvre du serviteur n'est qu'une excuse convenant à son impuissance et à sa misère. Pour le*

<sup>453</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 93.

<sup>454</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Un petit traité de 'Abdullāh Anṣārī,» *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, 155.

<sup>455</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 39.

<sup>456</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādjā*, 144.

*Privilegié, la pure Réalité est que Dieu est l'auteur du dévouement, de l'attachement et de l'attention du serviteur à Son égard, sans que subsiste du serviteur rien qui persiste dans une apparence distinctive, ou qui puisse être nommé, ou qui laisse une trace, ou qu'il soit possible de qualifier, ou qui soit attribuable à un moment déterminé. «Ils nous seront certes présentés. » (Q. 36:32 and 53).<sup>457</sup>*

### *ṭarīq al-khāṣṣa*

Know that nothing can be done, with all the means available in the creation, to reply to disciples seeking guidance (and answers for) inscrutable questions (such as) the “making of a hole in the ship of the destitute” and “the killing of the adolescent.” However, (what can be said is):

- 1) The will (*irāda*) of the privileged is to desist from all wishes (*murādā*) by seeing in it (only) what God wants, for Him and only Him: “If He wills some mercy for me, can they withhold His mercy?” (Q.39:38)
- 2) The renunciation (*zuhd*) of the privileged is to keep (their) aspirations (*himma*) away from the dispersion of the existent (world), because God has exonerated them from depending on circumstances, thanks to the Light of the Unveiling (*nūr al-kashf*): “We have purified them by means of a pure thought: remembrance of the Abode (in the Hereafter)” (Q.38:46).
- 3) The trust (*tawakkul* in God) of the privileged is their contentment (*riḍā*) with the planning (*tadbīr*) of God and freedom from their own (personal) planning, and their freedom from the anxious inclination to hand over their affairs to (themselves) to be taken care of. This is because of their expectation that the Planner (*Mudabbir*) is taking care of their affairs and is carrying them through on the basis of His knowledge of their interests (*maṣāliḥ*), as well as their freedom from engaging themselves in a controversy (*munāzaʿa*) with Him in the matter, (since they are) “...well-pleased and well-pleasing to Him ” (Q.87:28)
- 4) The endurance (*ṣabr*) of the privileged is forbidding their hearts (to engage in) evil suspicions (*khawāṭir*) and knowing that God has no decree (that is) deprived of compassion (*raʿfa*) or is beyond clemency (*raḥma*): “He tests the believers by a fair test from Him” (Q.8:17).
- 5) The sorrow (*ḥuzn*) of the privileged is to lose all hope for (the part of) themselves which “commands to evil” (Q.12:53). “Truly, man [or woman] is ungrateful to his/her Lord” (Q.100:6).
- 6) The fear (*khawf*) of the privileged is awe and veneration (*hayba*) towards His Majesty (*Jalāl*) and not fearing (His) chastisement (‘*adhāb*). Because fearing chastisement is to strive for the self (*nafs*) in order to protect it, (while) awe and veneration toward (His) Majesty is to glorify God and to forget the self (*nafs*): “They fear their Lord high above them.” (Q.16:50).
- 7) The hope (*rijā*) of the privileged is their craving thirst (*ḡamaʿ*) for the beverage in which they are drowned and by which they are made drunk: “Have you not looked toward your Lord...?” (Q.25:45)

<sup>457</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 237; «Un petit traité de ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī sur les déficiences inhérentes à certaines demeures spirituelles,» in *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, vol. 1 (Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1956), 153 – 71. See the entire translation of the treatise, *Chemin*, 231 - 39 and partial English translation, Farhādī, ‘*Abdullāh*, 91 - 97.

8) The thankfulness (*shukr*) of the privileged is their delight (*surūr*) with what they have found (*bi mawjūd-ihim*): “Rejoice, then, in the bargain that you have made!” (Q.9:111).

9) The love (*maḥabba*) of the privileged is their annihilation (*fanā*) in the love of God for His intimates (*aḥibbā’-ihī*):

10) The longing (*shawq*) of the privileged is their escaping from their own habit (*rasm*) and marks (*simā*): “I hastened to You Lord, that You might be well-pleased!” (Q 20:84)

All stations – will, renunciation, trust, endurance, sorrow, fear, hope, thankfulness, love, and longing – are stations of the people of the law (*Shar‘* – who are) journeying toward Reality (*ḥaqiqāh*). But when they contemplate Reality, the stages (*aḥwāl*) of the journeyers will vanish, so that what was not (always) there (*mā lam yakun*) will be annihilated, so that what was (always) there will subsist, and so that what (always) was not (*mā lam yakun*) will vanish (*yafnā*): “And the Face of Your Lord will remain!” (*yabqā* – Q.55:27)<sup>458</sup>

In this treatise, the master radicalizes his demands concerning *tawḥīd*. His teaching stands as a warning to wayfarers and an antidote to the hazards in the stages of progress toward God. De Beaurecueil asserts that there is a continuity and consistency in the master’s line of thought in both *Manāzil* and the *‘Ilal al-maqāmāt*. *Tawḥīd* (unification) is the final goal of the path of the privileged and God is their ultimate aim, the only one who governs their lives, and commands their actions, and the object of their love. Thus, de Beaurecueil concludes:

*On a donc une unification extrême de la vie spirituelle due à la concentration en Dieu de l’attention, et non à une communauté d’existence; et c’est là un des mérites de ce petit traité que de nous montrer qu’Anṣārī est demeuré jusqu’à la fin dans la tradition des shuhūdiyya.*<sup>459</sup>

This short treatise falls squarely within the master’s spiritual thought and brings to completion two previous ones: *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil*.

<sup>458</sup> Farḥādī, *‘Abdullāh*, 95 - 97.

<sup>459</sup> De Beaurecueil, “Un petit traité de ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī,” *Mélanges Louis Massignon* 1 (Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1956), 155.



## 2 *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil al-sā'irīn*

A parallel reading of *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil* shows best Anṣārī's own spiritual development and maturity. Most of de Beaurecueil's effort to understand the master's spiritual teaching lies in these two treatises. Anṣārī dictated *Ṣad maydān* at the age of fifty, around the year 1056-57,<sup>460</sup> twenty-two years after his *samā'* experience in Nūbādhān, which led to a decision to forsake drunken mysticism once and for all.<sup>461</sup> The master dictated his work at a point where he had enjoyed almost twelve years of a serene life without trials of exile or prison. During this time of reprieve, he devoted his energy to teaching and particularly to his commentary on the Qur'ān. For example, the backdrop of the *Ṣad maydān* was his commentary on Q. 3:31, "Say: if you love God, follow me: God will love you and forgive you your sins."<sup>462</sup>

In 1082, twenty-six years later, the master revised, expanded and re-titled his previous work from *Kitāb Ṣad maydān* to *Kitāb Manāzil al-sā'irīn*. By that time, he was blind and had only seven years to live. The *Manāzil* finally answered a persistent request of his students and followers in Herāt and Balkh to rework his earlier treatise and correct its failures and inconsistencies. This second treatise, written in Arabic, was the master's

<sup>460</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 40; Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 60; Angha, *An Annotated*, 146. Nubādhān is located near Herāt and now called Nawbādām.

<sup>461</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, «*Les journées de Nobādhān*», 71 - 76. The experience of Nubādhān is reported in Jāmī's *Nafahāt al-uns*, 218 - 19 and the master's *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*, 205 - 206. In his biography, de Beaurecueil narrates this incident. In the middle of the winter of 1034, Anṣārī was invited to a Ṣūfī gathering in Nubādhān, where a good number of Ṣūfī Shaykh, well advanced in spiritual exercises convened for *samā'*. Anṣārī mesmerized his peers and the audience by his rhetorical genius and spiritual insights. The participants engaged in *samā'* and the master followed along with the crowd. De Beaurecueil reports the master's recollection: *Un jour, je m'adonnai au samā', transporté d'émotion, je déchirai mes vêtements. En sortant du samā', je me rendis à la mosquée-cathédrale. J'étais encore dans l'ivresse du samā', lorsque l'un d'eux s'approcha et me demanda: 'Quel est ce jeune homme, portant à la main une longue tige de narcisse qui se trouvait avec toi durant le samā'? Et chaque fois qu'il approchait ce narcisse de tes narines, ton émotion augmentait et tes forces t'abandonnaient davantage.' Je lui dis: 'Ne révèle cela à personne d'autre.'* After this conversation the master was so distraught that he left the vicinity immediately, abandoned all the gifts he received and headed to Herāt with his old prayer mat. Since the incident, he would never take part in *samā'* and discouraged his disciples to do so. After this experience of intoxication, he opted for the sober path.

<sup>462</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 100; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 40 - 41.

ultimate spiritual gift to posterity. There was not only a difference in structure but also in the content. The master introduced each station with a related Qur'ānic verse with remarkable care. The differences in structure and content, however, confirm a general progress in his spiritual thought and reinforced the spiritual connection between *Kitāb Ṣad maydān* and *Kitāb Manāzil al-sā'irīn*

In both treatises the master is aware that spiritual growth differs from one student to another, and he insists on God's absolute freedom to impede or increase spiritual progress. The images and the terms used are designed to reveal and describe the 'fields,' and 'stages or stations.' The use of chapters suggest a dynamic character of the spiritual path.<sup>463</sup> The term "station (*maqām*) signifies that which may be attained by control and may be realized through seeking hardship and suffering, and the way –station (*manzil*) may be considered as a stopping place for training."<sup>464</sup> Interestingly enough, the master does not use the word *maqām* (*demeure*, dwelling) in either of the titles of his major treatises; he prefers *maydān* (fields) and *Manāzil* (stations). De Beaurecueil finds this choice significant: «*Anṣārī parlera de cent Terrains (maydān), terme neutre évoquant un terrain d'exercice ou un champ de bataille.*»<sup>465</sup> As Angha observes, however, in *Ṣad maydān*, the master at times uses dwelling (*maqām*) and station (*manzil*) as synonymous terms, and does not oppose them nor differentiate.<sup>466</sup> As the master teaches in the preface, «*Chacune de ces mille demeures est une étape pour celui qui chemine, et une demeure pour celui qui trouve.*»<sup>467</sup>

<sup>463</sup> As de Beaurecueil notes «*Anṣārī parlera de chapitres, montrant qu'il s'agit bien simplement d'un ordo expositioni.*» *Chemin*, 47.

<sup>464</sup> Nurbakhsh, *Ṣūfī*, Vol. 8, 90.

<sup>465</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 41.

<sup>466</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 64.

<sup>467</sup> De Beaurecueil's translation, in *Chemin*, 84. Angha's translation is found on page 147. Most Sūfī manuals describe the major stations (*maqāmāt*), dwellings (*manāzil*), and states (*aḥwāl* or *ḥālāt*). Ḥujwīrī's *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, trans. Nicholson, 18; Qushayrī's *Risāla*, trans. Knysh, 77 - 78; Ritter notes, "the states of the soul which come over mystics when they are seeking God are manifold, and the halting-stations they must traverse are great in number." *The Ocean*, trans. O'Kane, 341. See also Ian Netton «The Breath of Felicity: *Adab, aḥwāl, Maqāmāt* and Abū Najīb al-Suhrawardī» in *The Heritage*, ed. , Lewisohn, 457 - 483.

De Beaurecueil and Angha have examined in detail the differences in terms of vocabulary, structure, and classification of stages, citations, and definitions and description of terms between the two treatises.<sup>468</sup> Angha notes that “*Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil* have fifty-one stations in common and differ in forty-nine stations.”<sup>469</sup> De Beaurecueil adds that even though the two treatises stem from the same author and share many features, the differences are obvious. He writes about *Manāzil*:

*... l'introduction annonce une structure très stricte (dix sections de dix chapitres, analysés selon trois degrés), la liste des notions étudiées n'est pas la même, leur place dans l'itinéraire a changé ainsi que les citations coraniques qui les introduisent, les définitions sont rigoureuses, les analyses laissent peu de place à la fantaisie, les comparaisons sont discrètes et les envolées sont exclues.*<sup>470</sup>

According to Angha, the master sought in *Ṣad maydān* to lead wayfarers to God or to attain proximity with God (*qurb*).<sup>471</sup> Each field follows a standard structure: definition and description of the field, a ranking of the class of wayfarers, and a grouping of the attributes of each station.<sup>472</sup> According to Anṣārī, there are three types of people on the spiritual journey: “They are people of spiritual realization and verification (*ahl-i taḥqīq*), or those who have listened to God and are enraptured by the divine ecstasy (*ahl-i samāʿ*), finally, there are the people of self-delusion who claim that they do know (*ahl-al daʿwā*).”<sup>473</sup> The master dwells on the qualification of the three groups and teaches that the first group is the

<sup>468</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Une ébauche persane ...», *Mélanges Islamologiques*, IFAO 2 (1954): 1 - 27; *Chemin*, 37 - 39; Angha, *An Annotated*, 67 - 72 and 99 - 145.

<sup>469</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 68. In chapter four “Key Concepts in *Ṣad maydān*, A comparative Study” she delves into a comparison of *Ṣad maydān*, the *Munājāt*; *Kashf al-asrār*, 95 - 145.

<sup>470</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 45 - 46.

<sup>471</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 78.

<sup>472</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 78. De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 47.

<sup>473</sup> Angha *An Annotated*, 78; *samāʿ* means audition and listening. Javad Nurbakhsh in *Sūfī Symbolism*, Vol. 2, (London: Khāniqāh-i Nimatullāhi Publications, 1984), 189. Nurbakhsh describes *samāʿ* as “the realization and discovery of mystical states which is necessarily accompanied by the loss of the faculties of retention and judgment in one’s internal consciousness.” *Daʿwā* literally means pretense or false claim. In Sūfism the term refers to all forms of heedless spiritual pretense and self-delusion. *Ahl-i daʿwā* refers to those who claim falsely to possess any spiritual insights. Also, *EI*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. *Samāʿ*, *Daʿwā*, and *taḥqīq*; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, (three types of wayfarers), 41.

‘*ārif*’, those who know and have discovered the knowledge of the spiritual path and the divine light illumines their heart. The second group refers to people of ecstatic rapture (*ahl-i samā’*). This group is mentioned in field no. 87 of *Ṣad maydān*. They have found illumination through the experience of hearing God’s word and commands (*amr*). The last group pretends to have spiritual knowledge but is in self-delusion (*ahl-al da’wa*).<sup>474</sup>

Likewise in the *Manāzil*, the master classifies the wayfarers in three groups: the *murīd* (disciples), *murād* (masters) and the impostors (*da’wi kunanda*).<sup>475</sup> In the master’s own words:

*Par ailleurs, en cette affaire les gens sont de trois types: un homme qui agit, partagé entre la crainte et l’espérance et tendant vers l’amour sans quitter la pudeur; c’est celui qu’on appelle le murīd. Un homme ravi de la vallée de la dispersion vers la vallée de la concentration en Dieu; c’est celui qu’on appelle le murād. Celui qui n’est ni l’un ni l’autre est un prétentieux, induit en tentation, séduit.*<sup>476</sup>

In addition, he classified the dwelling places in

*J’ai distingué à ton intention les degrés de chacune des demeures, afin que tu connaisses le degré du Commun des Gens qui s’adonnent, puis le degré du Progressant, puis le degré du Réalisateur. Chacun d’entre eux a une règle de démarche, un chemin et une direction qui lui sont assignés.*<sup>477</sup>

Angha relies on Mullā’ī’s view to show the place of *Ṣad maydān* in the Persian world:

“This treatise is one of the most important and carefully systematized esoteric masterpieces ever written in Persian on the stages and stations of the spiritual journey. It represents not only Anṣārī’s logical and analytical mind but also his poetic and literary style on describing the stages and stations of the inner journey,”<sup>478</sup> and she adds that the *Ṣad maydān* is

<sup>474</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 79.

<sup>475</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 80.

<sup>476</sup> Quoted by de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 46.

<sup>477</sup> Quoted by de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 47.

<sup>478</sup> Quoted by Angha, *An Annotated*, 46 (from Mullā’ī, *Majmu’a*, 128) .

“written in a rhythmic prose literary form similar to poetry with a calculated beat.”<sup>479</sup> There is no doubt that Anṣārī’s literary skills and poetic talents contributed to the success and popularity of his spiritual teachings. De Beaurecueil puts *Ṣad maydān* in context, «*Il s’agit de notes prises par un disciple (ou par plusieurs, tant sont nombreuses et importantes les variantes entre les manuscrits) au cours d’un enseignement oral, où le maître se laissait aller à l’inspiration du moment.*»<sup>480</sup> *Ṣad maydān* begins with repentance (*tawba*) and concludes with the field of subsistence in God (*baqā*). The master adds another stage, love (*maḥabba*), which is the sublimation and unification of all the hundred fields.

De Beaurecueil does recognize that the two treatises are not equal in literary quality and spiritual acumen:

*De la série de cours sur l’itinéraire spirituel, Les cent terrains ne nous donnent que le squelette, le maître étant là pour étoffer à sa guise et répondre aux questions des auditeurs. Prenons-les pour tels, sans demander à l’ouvrage plus qu’il ne saurait nous donner.*<sup>481</sup>

Bo Utas agrees and calls *Ṣad maydān* “a Persian sketch of the *Manāzil*.”<sup>482</sup> De Beaurecueil’s earlier remark is well taken because many scholars would lament part of the structural problem and inconsistencies in *Ṣad maydān*.<sup>483</sup> He notes that in *The Hundred Fields*, stations follow each other without a solid organizing structure to bind them in a coherent manner. Some fields do not follow the three by three scheme – a definition of the field, a raking of the classes of the wayfarers, and a grouping of the attribute of each station.<sup>484</sup> He adds:

<sup>479</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 9. Anṣārī himself wrote in the tradition of *saj’*, a literary style used by poets before and after him. Muṣliḥu al-dīn Sā’dī’s (d. 1295) master piece, *Gulistān* is the example that Farhādī points out as the reference text in the *saj’* style. See *The Gulistān (Rose Garden) of Sā’dī: Bilingual English and Persian Edition with Vocabulary*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Bethesda, MD: IBEX Publishers, 2008).

<sup>480</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 38.

<sup>481</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 38.

<sup>482</sup> Bo Utas «The Munājāt or ‘Ilāhī nāma of ‘Abdu’llah Anṣārī» *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, vol. 3, 83.

Also, de Beaurecueil «Une ébauche persane ...» *BIFAO*, vol. 2, 10.

<sup>483</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, “Inconsistencies in the classification,” 89.

<sup>484</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 89.

*Que Les Cent Terrains, avec leur imprécision et leur inégalité, nous déçoivent parfois et nous laissent sur notre faim, c'est normal. Ce ne sont que des notes de cours. Il eut fallu entendre les développements d'Anṣārī de nos propres oreilles. Certains chapitres sont cependant des merveilles. Ceux notamment concernant l'anéantissement et la subsistance (ch.99 et 100), dans leur brièveté, sont d'une force inégalable.*<sup>485</sup>

The inconsistencies and failures in structure and organization contained in *Ṣad maydān*<sup>486</sup> are corrected in *Manāzil*. In this latter spiritual manual, the master states clearly the reasons of his endeavor. His thought has evolved from a moralistic perspective to a focus on the mystical path. The structural difference and shift in classification point to an evolution in the master's own understanding of spiritual stages and their importance. Hence, the *Manāzil* is a revised and polished version of *Ṣad maydān* with reordering of the fields and the suppression of a few others. Farhādī corroborates:

If there is a classical Ṣūfī treatise with a clear structure, it is this work.

- 1) Dictated in Arabic by Anṣārī who, by then, was blind, it contains:
- 2) A preface and an introduction,
- 3) Ten sections (*abwāb*). Each section contains ten chapters, and each chapter presents a 'station' *manzil*. An epilogue, which is at the end of the Hundredth Stations is the Unification (*tawḥīd*).<sup>487</sup>

In the first treatise the master starts with *tawba* (return to God) and ends with *maḥabba* (love); the second treatise starts with *yaqaza* (awakening) and concludes with *tawḥīd* (Unification).<sup>488</sup> Angha in her study of *Ṣad maydān* shows clearly the difference in structure and classification of both treatises.<sup>489</sup> De Beaucueuil also speaks of the difference between the two treatises:

*Les différences apparaissent dès qu'on y regarde d'un peu près: l'introduction annonce une structure très stricte (dix sections de dix chapitres, analysés chacun selon trois degrés), la liste des notions étudiées n'est pas la même, leur place dans*

<sup>485</sup> De Beaucueuil, *Chemin*, 45.

<sup>486</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 89.

<sup>487</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 75.

<sup>488</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 68 - 72. She presents a parallel between *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil*.

<sup>489</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 68 - 72, and chapter four: "Key Concepts in *Ṣad maydān*, A Comparative Study," 95.

*l'itinéraire a changé ainsi que les citations coraniques qui les introduisent, les définitions sont rigoureuses, les analyses laissent peu de place à la fantaisie, les comparaisons sont discrètes et les envolées sont exclues.*<sup>490</sup>

The originality of this treatise reflects the master's own spiritual maturity through trials (prison and exile). There are hundred *maqāmāt* divided into ten groups or sections, which are: *bidāyāt* (Beginnings), *abwāb* (Doors), *mu'āmalāt* (Actions), *akhlāq* (Virtues), *uṣūl* (Principles), *awdiya* (Valleys), *aḥwāl* (Spiritual states), *wilāyāt* (Guardianship), *ḥaqā'iq* (Realities), and *nihāyāt* (Fulfillments)<sup>491</sup>. In addition, each *maqām* or station has three stages of realization (*darajāt*). Besides, a few exceptions, the master remains faithful to the structure. The three to three schemes are maintained with absolute rigor through the hundred stages. The introduction gives crucial clues to the goal of and reason for the treatise. Anṣārī in his own words:

*Un groupe de ceux qui désirent être au courant des Étapes des Itinérants vers Dieu, des Pauvres, gens de Hérat et d'ailleurs m'ont demandé depuis longtemps de leur faire un exposé sur la connaissance qu'on en peut avoir, qui pût servir comme des légendes sur les poteaux qui les indiquent. Je leur ai répondu par cet ouvrage, après avoir invoqué Dieu et imploré Son aide. Il m'ont prié de leur présenter ces étapes en les disposant d'une manière qui indiquât leur ordre de succession et qui montrât les ramifications qu'elles comportent, d'exclure de mon exposé les dires d'autrui et de le faire bref, afin de le rendre plus agréable à prononcer et plus facile à retenir.*<sup>492</sup>

The significance of *Manāzil* is reflected in the number of commentaries on the treatise in both the Arab and Persian worlds. These commentaries cover a range of schools of thought, from the *ittiḥādiyya* (unification with God or the Creator and the created become one), *wujūdiyya* (there is only one essence and that is God, *waḥdat al wujūd*) to the *shuhūdiyya* (the universe and all that it contains is so far transcended by the majesty of God's reality that all else counts for nothing. The universe is a mirror in which the Divine

<sup>490</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 45 - 46.

<sup>491</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 81; de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 283 - 86.

<sup>492</sup> Quoted by de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 154.

attributes are reflected),<sup>493</sup> and including scholars who object to these schools. In the words of Caspar:

The influence of this *shaikh al-Islam* was considerable, a fact to which the numerous commentaries on his writings testify. More remarkable still is the fact that these commentaries represent a wide range of tendencies extending from the monists (disciples of Ibn ‘Arabī) such as Shams al-Dīn al-Tustarī to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, the impetuous disciple of Ibn Taymiyya. His influence appears still to exist in our time, for one can find in Cairo recent editions of the Book of Stages and the commentaries of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.<sup>494</sup>

De Beaurecueil scrutinized the major commentators of the *Manāzil* to show the scope of the master’s influence on posterity. He listed the following commentators chronologically.<sup>495</sup> In the 13th century, ‘Abd al-Mu‘tī al-Laḥmī al-Iskandarī wrote the oldest surviving commentary,<sup>496</sup> and toward the end of the century ‘Affīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. 1291) wrote his. In the 14th century ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. 1334), Shams al-Dīn al-Tustarī, Maḥmūd al-Darguzīnī, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) and Maḥmūd al-Firkāwī signed their commentaries. The latter commentary is largely a revised version of ‘Abd al-Mu‘tī’s without new insights. Other commentators were: in the 15<sup>th</sup> Zayn al-Dīn al-Khwāfī and Shams al-Dīn al-Tabādkānī, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf Munāwī, and the latest mentioned by de Beaurecueil is Maḥmūd al-Fayḍ al-Manūfī, who published his commentary in 1969.<sup>497</sup> These commentators provided multiple readings and interpretations of the master’s work.

According to de Beaurecueil, some commentators, such as ‘Abd al-Mu‘tī al-Laḥmī al-Iskandarī and Maḥmūd al-Firkāwī, sought to justify by all means the structure of the

<sup>493</sup> See, *ittiḥādīyya*, *shuhūdīyya* and *wujūdīyya* in John A. Subhan, *Ṣūfism: Its Saint and Shrines* (Toronto: Indigo Books, 2002), 52; Reza Pirbhay, *Reconsidering Islam in a South Asia Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 59 - 62; and R. W. J. Austin, *Ibn ‘Arabī: The Bezels of Wisdom* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980).

<sup>494</sup> Caspar, “Muslim Mysticism,” *Studies*, ed., M. L. Swartz, 179.

<sup>495</sup> See also Mughal’s list of commentators with complete biographical references in *Ṣad maydān*, 14 - 15.

<sup>496</sup> In the collection entitled «*Anṣārīyyāt*,» *IFAO*. t. 27, de Beaurecueil edited and introduced two commentaries on the *Manāzil* by ‘Abd al-Mu‘tī al-Laḥmī al-Iskandarī and Maḥmūd al-Firkāwī. Also, “Structure du Livre des étapes” *MIDEO 11* (1972): 80 - 91 under the title, «L’opinion des commentateurs.»

<sup>497</sup> De Beaurecueil, «Structure du Livre des étapes,» *MIDEO 11* (1972): 80 - 91. See also, *Chemin*, 47 - 55.



book and the classification of the stages. Others, Maḥmūd al-Darguzīnī and Zayn al-Dīn al-Khwāfī tried to match the structure of the book to Abū Bakr al-Kattānī's saying «*Entre le serviteur et Dieu il est mille demeures de lumière et d'obscurité.*»<sup>498</sup> De Beaurecueil believed that most of them missed the suppleness of the Pīr of Herāt's spiritual wisdom. He remarks:

*Apparemment très simple et très systématique, la structure des Étapes est donc assez complexe. Bien que respectant le cadre qu'il s'est fixé pour répondre aux exigences de ses disciples, l'auteur use d'une très grande liberté dans le choix des notions étudiées et dans leur analyse. Il eût souri devant l'ingéniosité des commentateurs pour harmoniser toutes les données de l'introduction, dont certaines avaient précisément pour but de relativiser l'importance de la structure de l'ouvrage.*<sup>499</sup>

The master's spiritual path was not rigid and unyielding, but he crafted a flexible and dynamic structure suitable to wayfarers' spiritual experiences. *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil* are not linear classifications of spiritual stages, but spiritual road maps with stages which were simple to follow and to remember. The main reasons of the treatises were didactic and mnemonic. After all, the spiritual path depends on the student's discipline and God's grace.<sup>500</sup> The master refers in the preface of *Ṣad maydān* to Abū 'Ubayd al-Baṣṭī's observation: «*Dieu a des serviteurs à qui Il fait voir en leurs débuts ce que recèlent leurs suprêmes étapes.*»<sup>501</sup>

These various interpretations were valuable sources for de Beaurecueil and he depended on them to craft his own understanding. He noted that Kāshānī and Darguzīnī were ingenious interpreters while Ibn al-Qayyim offered a courageous critical reading.

<sup>498</sup> De Beaurecueil, «La structure du livre des étapes,» *MIDEO* 1 (1954): 77.

<sup>499</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 65.

<sup>500</sup> De Beaurecueil, «La structure du livre des étapes,» *MIDEO* 11 (1972): 90 - 91. Farhādī makes a similar remark, "The spelling out of each subject in three items, as well as the exposition of the entire matter in 10 x 10 chapters, is meant only as *aide-mémoire*, and not intended to be mathematically concretized." "The Hundred Grounds of Abdullāh Anṣārī," in *The Heritage*, ed., Lewisohn, 388.

<sup>501</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 154.

Anṣārī is indeed a master, and his work is pregnant with insight, with something that remains to be developed, or needs to be unfolded and unpacked. His mystical intuition expresses well the ineffable experience of an encounter with God. One could conjecture differences in poetic possibilities between writing in Persian dialect and in formal Arabic; however, de Beaurecueil and others scholars do not see a dramatic influence due to the language shift. The real impact of *Manāzil*'s being written in Arabic is the concision and precision of the terms. In addition, the latter treatise profits from theological and mystical technical terms in Arabic and thus expands his readership above and beyond the Persian world of *Ṣad maydān*.

Finally, let us examine the style or literary device of these treatises. Apart from the similarity in organization between *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil*, the master utilizes a common literary device. Angha believes that Anṣārī borrows the simplicity of the Sāmānids' literary style along with the complexity of the Ghaznavids and Saljūks approach. The master tends to avoid unnecessary words and verb repetition in rhymed prose. According to Angha, these mystical treatises were collected at a time when the Ghaznavids and later the Seljuks favored and encouraged the development of mystical writing.<sup>502</sup> Most of the master's treatises are built in the same format, following a fifth century literary style of *saj'*. Angha defines the style:

*Saj'* rhyming and rhythmic prose, is a literary style between poetry and prose. It does not entirely follow the restricted technique of poetry nor does it follow the free style of prose. It includes rhythm, its phrases usually consist of three to four words, phrases have similar beats, and certain words or letters are repeated in every phrase.<sup>503</sup>

<sup>502</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 58. According to the author, the Saljūk vizier Nizām al-Mulk's endowment of schools and scholarships to teachers produced a profusion of spiritual writings, such as, *Nūr al-'ulūm* by Abū Ḥasan Kharāqānī, *Kashf al-mahjūb* by Ḥujwīrī; *Asrār al-tawḥīd* by Muḥammad ibn Munawwar; Qushayrī's *Risāla*, Anṣārī's *Ṣad maydān*.

<sup>503</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 61.

... the literary style of *saj'* in *Ṣad maydān* is composed with such a thoughtful calculation that reader must dwell on each phrase in order to understand his point and be able to discover the meaning that links the ideas together.<sup>504</sup>

Indeed, the *saj'* literary style in these spiritual treatises is designed to capture readers' attention and bring them to a still point. According to Thackston, "The use of internal rhyme at pausal point, a device known as *saj'*, encountered throughout the Qur'ān and common in Arabic and Persian literary style, gives these sentences an extraordinary rhythmical fluidity and cadence."<sup>505</sup> Novices and students on the spiritual path are invited to linger on each line or phrase in order to understand and grasp the undergirding ideas. Even though the phrases are short, and seem simple and concise, the underlying message is complex and sometimes difficult to follow. The master's use of rhyme and rhythm awakens in the reader the esoteric understanding of the spiritual stages and stations. As literary masterpieces, these treatises have stood the test of time and inspired many other mystics because of the depth of the message. These treatises represent the master's astute choice of words and unparalleled use of rhythm and rhyme.

For his part, Farhādī, under the rubric "Stylistic Features of *The Hundred Grounds*,"<sup>506</sup> explains the master's method of composition. He remarks that his approach was entirely practical with the underlying goal of being, "didactic and homiletic, designed to guide his student-novices in the memorization of difficult subjects."<sup>507</sup> The master used three main techniques of memorization in the mnemonic tradition of *The Hundred Grounds*: first, "Eloquent and vigorous expression in the form of aphorisms, adages, maxims, and precepts," and second, "parallel ends and internal rhyme or a *saj'* (rhymed prose with rhymes recurring by way of consonance or assonance, at parallel points in a

<sup>504</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 59. Also, parts of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth are also written in *saj'* style.

<sup>505</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn 'Aṭā' illāh*, 176.

<sup>506</sup> Farhādī, "The Hundred Grounds of Abdullāh Anṣārī," in *The Heritage*, ed., Lewisohn, 387.

<sup>507</sup> Farhādī, "The Hundred Grounds of Abdullāh Anṣārī," in *The Heritage*, ed., Lewisohn, 387.

sentence),” and third, the “Itemization into ternary form of the treatise’s subject-matter or ideas.”<sup>508</sup>

Even though *Manāzil* is a mature work and profits from the literary and technical genius of the Arabic language, the first field (*tawba*) in *Ṣad maydān*, in our view, captures best the *saj’* rhyming and rhythmic prose and the master’s mnemonic and didactic style.

De Beaurecueil’s French translation is much more poetic than the English versions of Angha, Mughal and Farhādī.<sup>509</sup>

1<sup>st</sup> Field: *tawba*,

*Le retour à Dieu,*

*Le premier terrain est la demeure du retour à Dieu. La tawba, c’est revenir à Dieu. «Revenez à Dieu d’une façon loyale!» (Coran, LXVI, 8). Sache que la science est une vie, la sagesse un miroir, la satisfaction un rempart, l’espérance une avocate, se rappeler de Dieu un remède, et le retour à Dieu un antidote. Le retour à Dieu est le signe indiquant la route, le maître des cérémonies, la clé du trésor, l’intercesseur permettant la rencontre, le grand médiateur, la condition pour être agréé, le secret de toute joie.*

*Les fondements du retour à Dieu sont au nombre de trois: le regret dans le cœur, l’excuse sur la langue, la rupture avec le mal et ceux qui le font.*

*Les sortes de retour à Dieu sont au nombre de trois: le retour de l’obéissant, le retour du désobéissant, et le retour du Connaissant. L’obéissant doit se repentir d’estimer nombreux ses actes d’obéissance, le désobéissant doit se repentir d’estimer peu nombreux ses actes de désobéissance, le Connaissant doit se repentir d’oublier les bienfaits [de Dieu].*

*L’estime excessive des actes d’obéissance se reconnaît à trois signes: le premier consiste à s’estimer sauvé par sa propre conduite, le deuxième consiste à mépriser les défaillants, le troisième est de ne plus rechercher les vices de son propre agir.*

<sup>508</sup> Farhādī, “The Hundred Grounds of Abdullāh Anṣārī,” in *The Heritage*, ed., Lewisohn, 389. The author goes further and adds that the first technique is the master’s preferred style found also in *Dhamm al-Kalām*, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, *Kashf al-asrār*. In this regard, Anṣārī followed a style found in the sayings of Abū Sa‘īd ibn Abī l’ Khayr (d. 1049), Ibn Munawwar’s *asrār al-tawḥīd*, and parts of Ḥujwīrī’s *Kashf al-maḥjūb* follow a similar technique. A later treatise composed after Anṣārī, Aḥmad Ghazālī’s (d. 1126) *Sawānīḥ* falls under this category. Farhādī asserts that the second technique is especially the popular *mathnawī*’s metric form. He cites Sanā‘ī’s *Ḥadīqa*, Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s (d. 1221) *Illāhi-nāma*, and *Manṭiq al ṭayr*, and of course Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī’s encyclopedic *Matnawī*. They all exemplify this genre. Finally, in *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil*, the ternary system is fully utilized. The master’s ideas and teachings are arranged in ternate form, or in sets of three. The author points to earlier didactic works to show that this tri- partite division of subjects for mnemonic purpose has many precedents. He cites Ḥakīm Maysarī’s *Dānish-nāma*. On this note Farhādī and de Beaurecueil believe that the most influential work on Anṣārī’s thought was Abū Manṣūr Iṣfahānī’s (d. 1027) *Risāla-yi nahj al-khāṣṣ*.

<sup>509</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 149; Farhādī, ‘*Abdullāh*, 63; *Ṣad Maidan, Hundred Fields between Man and God*, trans. Munir Aḥmad Mughal, (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1983).

*La minimisation des actes de désobéissance se reconnaît à trois signes: le premier consiste à s'estimer digne de pardon, le deuxième consiste à se croire à l'abri de tout dommage, le troisième consiste à fréquenter ceux qui font du mal. L'oubli des bienfaits [de Dieu] se reconnaît à trois signes : le premier consiste à détacher de soi tout regard de mépris, le deuxième consiste à accorder de la valeur à son état [spirituel], le troisième consiste à demeurer à un degré inférieur en s'arrêtant à la joie de connaître [Dieu].<sup>510</sup>*

A sample of a few more fields (or grounds) give us a better grasp of spiritual lessons turn into poetic utterances in *saj'* form:

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Field: Magnanimity (*muruwwat*)

From the field of Repentance the field of Magnanimity is generated. Magnanimity means being humble and living with poverty, as God Most High says: "Stand out firmly for justice" (Q.4:135).

Magnanimity has three cornerstones: living wisely and intelligently with oneself, living with patience with people, and living in need of God.

The indications of living wisely with oneself are three things: knowing one's worth (*qadr*), evaluating and realizing the limits of what one can do, and striving to improve oneself.

The signs of living patiently with people are three things: being satisfied and content with people according to their respective capacities, accepting and understanding their apologies, and being fair to them to the best of your ability.

The signs of living in need of God are in three things: considering it incumbent upon oneself to be thankfully grateful for whatever one receives from God, considering it incumbent upon oneself to apologize for whatever deeds one does for God's sake, and accepting God's will as rightful and best for oneself.

The 97<sup>th</sup> Ground: Contemplation and Witnessing (*mushāhada*)

The ground of bedazzlement the field of Contemplation arises from the ground of bedazzlement (*Dahshat*).

Words of God most Exalted: "... surely in that is a reminder for him [or her] who gives ear and is witness (*shahīd*)" (Q. 50:37).

The way (*ṭarīq*) is threefold:

realization of the degree of wisdom (*ḥikmat*) by means of the degree of knowledge (*'ilm*);

attainment of the degree of purity (*ṣafāwat*) by means of the degree of patience (*ṣabr*); and

realization of the degree of reality (*ḥaqīqah*) through the degree of knowing (*ma'rifah*).

1) Man [or woman] attains the degree of wisdom by means of the degree of knowledge in three ways:

putting one's knowledge (*'ilm*) to good use

venerating (God's) commandments (*amr*), and

<sup>510</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 86. See the English translation of *tawba* by Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 63; and Angha, *An Annotated*, 149 – 150 and Mughal *Ṣad maydān*, 21.

adhering faithfully to the Traditions (*Sunnah* of the Prophet) and this is the stage of the sages (*ḥakīmān*)

2) Man [or woman] attains the degree of purity through the degree of patience in three ways:

abandoning contention (*munāqahat*)

renouncing (worldly) schemes (*tadbīr*), and

considering contentment (*riḍā*) as necessary.

And this is the stage of the one (who is) content (*riḍā*) with God's will).

3) Man [or woman] attains degree of reality through the degree of knowing in three ways:

reverence (toward God) in solitude (*khalwat*),

reproaching one's self for inadequacy in rendering due service (to God), and

preferring (*īthār*) one's companions above one's self.<sup>511</sup>

This erudition of the master's three treatises shows the insight, wisdom and sagacity of his spiritual teachings. De Beaurecueil's choice to entitle the translation of these three treatises, *Chemin de Dieu*, reveals his own understanding of them. These treatises are spiritual guidebooks for wayfarers on their paths to God, and above all, the texts try to articulate and keep track of the ineffable experience of an encounter with God. Anṣārī's choice to dictate his *Ṣad maydān* in a local Persian dialect made it a forerunner in Persian mystical manuals. His poetic style of rhythmic and rhymed prose, the *saj'* literary style and his three-scheme structure for mnemonic and didactic purposes struck a chord in de Beaurecueil's spiritual thought. Angha remarks, "The poetic style of the rhyming prose he [Anṣārī] employed in *Ṣad maydān* was to usher in a new literary style in Persian literature, soon to be followed by Ṣūfī writers and sages such as Sā' dī of Shīrāz"<sup>512</sup> in his *Gulistān*<sup>513</sup>

Furthermore, the master's teachings offer a holistic approach to the spiritual path.

He divides the way to God in stages, stations or fields; he ranks the wayfarers in terms of

<sup>511</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 69. For other English translations, see Angha, *An Annotated*, 205; Mughal, *Ṣad maydān*, 150, and a French translation de Beaurecueil, *Chemin*, 147

<sup>512</sup> Angha, *An Annotated*, 145. On this front, it is important to add that if de Beaurecueil did not go as far as to declare Persian languages the most suitable locus for divine revelation like Massignon had done for Semitic languages, he was fond of the intelligence of Anṣārī, and his ability to render deep and seminal thought in vernacular with such beauty.

<sup>513</sup> See *The Gulistān of Shaykh Muṣliḥu 'd. dīn Sā' dī of Shīrāz*, ed. John Platts (London: W. H. Allan and Co., 1871). See footnote 475 for Thackston's translation.

novice, advanced and privileged; and finally he calls the wayfarers to be attentive to the deficiencies and pitfalls of the stations. He addresses inner thought and outer behavior, explains the level of knowledge and interaction between novices and outsiders. The Pīr of Herāt seems to have combined in his treatises the qualities of a number of Ṣūfī masters such as Qushayrī's penchant for a fine psychological analysis and his deep understanding of the experiences of the mystical wayfarers from the novice (*murīd*) to the master (*shaykh*), Sahl al-Tustarī's erudite mystical hermeneutic, the moral insights of Muḥāsibī, and the scriptural authority of Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj.<sup>514</sup>

In his presentation of the master's treatises, de Beaurecueil finds almost no fault with the corpus besides a few minor qualms. This veneration and master-student conversation sustained his theological endeavor and fueled his mystical interest and scholarship. Unlike Massignon, de Beaurecueil did not equate the Pīr of Herāt to any great figure in the Christian tradition, and did not elevate Anṣārī to a position not familiar to him in Islamic mystical history. At the same time, no one could deny that he, like many western scholars of Islamic mysticism, with zeal, passion and admiration for a single figure, was often led to overlook other important Ṣūfis and exaggerate the place of their masters. De Beaurecueil's choice to uphold one mystic above all others and dedicate a lifetime scholarship to the Pīr of Herāt is case in point, even though, the Dominican friar believed that his trajectory was largely providential. Likewise, his Dominican and Catholic faith plays a prominent role in his hermeneutic of the master's work and life. He shares with Massignon a similar religious intuition born in the intimacy of their faith and mystical experience in the land of Islam. In the face of incompatible tenets of faith between Islam

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<sup>514</sup> See Gavin Pecken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam: The Life and Work of al-Muḥāsibī* (London: Routledge, 2010); *Al-Qushayrī's Epistle on Ṣūfism*, trans. Alexander Knysh; Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'ānic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Sahl at-Tustarī (d. 283/896)*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980).

and Christianity and the impossibility of reconciling them, both seem to have chosen the seminal figure of the patriarch Abraham as the pivotal figure. He exemplified for them not only the primordial link between the two religions, but most unequivocally Abraham embodied the notion of mystical substitution on behalf of the other (his prayer for Lot and the city of Sodom and Gomorrah), his hospitality (to God's messengers), and his compassion.<sup>515</sup> In both the qur'ānic and biblical texts, the patriarch Abraham is revered for his hospitality to the strangers who visited him and turned out to be God's messengers. Abraham is the prime example of a host for Massignon and de Beaurecueil.

At any rate, no thorough investigation of de Beaurecueil's scholarship on Anṣārī's life and work could afford to neglect the collection of intimate conversations with God which made the master famous and popular all over the Muslim world, particularly in the Persian countries. Hence, the third section of this chapter examines the *Munājāt*.

### ***III The Munājāt or Cris du coeur***

There is no better introduction to the *Munājāt* than de Beaurecueil's own observation:

*Les 'Munājāt,' ces épanchements, violents, enthousiastes, amers parfois, de ce que l'on a 'dans le cœur' et 'sur le cœur', comprennent des prières, des conseils, des réflexions personnelles. Très populaires, ces 'cris du cœur' ont dépassé de beaucoup les cercles des Soufis pour alimenter les prières de tous les croyants ... Composée en 'saj', prose scandée par assonances, ces 'cris' tentent d'exprimer l'inexprimable: l'expérience spirituelle.*<sup>516</sup>

According to Farhādī, *Munājāt* mean "intimate and confidential conversation," or "intimate invocation to God," or "sincere and opened-hearted prayer."<sup>517</sup> On his part Wheeler

<sup>515</sup> De Beaurecueil named his house of hospitality for Afghan street children, *La maison d'Abraham*. See Massignon's marvelous, *Les trois prières d'Abraham* (Paris: Cerf, 1997) and *L'hospitalité sacrée*. (Paris: Nouvelle Cite, 1987).

<sup>516</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 161.

<sup>517</sup> Farhādī, *ʿAbdullāh*, 115.



Thackston speaks of “intimate conversation with someone,”<sup>518</sup> and Annabel Keeler prefers “intimate prayer and communing with God.”<sup>519</sup> The aphorisms and sayings in the *Munājāt* constitute a passionate and yet private and familiar monologue with God.<sup>520</sup> It is de Beaurecueil, however, who captures best the spirit of these intimate conversations. He remarks that ‘*confidence*’ is too polished and ‘*oraison*’ too reminiscent of prayer; he prefers *cris du coeur*. He explains, «*Leur ton souvent violent, enthousiaste ou amer, nous a suggéré de les intituler cris du coeur.*»<sup>521</sup> These intimate conversations with God are the Pīr of Herāt’s spiritual and poetic chef-d’œuvre. They have maintained an unprecedented level of popularity among rich and poor, Ṣūfīs and ordinary believers, and have served as lyrics for songs and a cash crop for many calligraphers and scribes throughout the centuries. In Herāt, the birth place of the master, they are as popular as the Qur’ān itself. In *Cris du Coeur*, de Beaurecueil recalls with regret that «*Radio Kabul en diffusait, il y a quelques années, des extraits tous les jours.*»<sup>522</sup>

If the *Ṣad maydān* and *Manāzil* are famous for their mnemonic and didactic acumen, the *Munājāt* are celebrated for their literary beauty and striking spiritual wisdom. These aphorisms and phrases are the fruit of deep spiritual experiences and mystical inclinations. Schimmel, in her preface to Danner’s and Thackston’s translations of *Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh’s Hikam* and Anṣārī’s *Munājāt*, writes, “... the brevity of both *Hikam* and *Munājāt* proves the immense self-control of the mystics who were able to condense their deepest feelings and their loftiest experiences in small, gemlike, perfectly polished sayings.”<sup>523</sup> These “gemlike, perfectly polished sayings” were used as prayers for their

<sup>518</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 175.

<sup>519</sup> Keeler, *Ṣūfī*, 249.

<sup>520</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 175.

<sup>521</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 28.

<sup>522</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 161.

<sup>523</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, xiv.

artistic quality, their exquisite wisdom and the spiritual comfort they bestow on wayfarers. De Beaurecueil sees a connection between the language of the text and the intensity and depth of its message. He writes, «... *ses Munājāt, oraisons et remarques en prose rimée, où la musique de la langue s'allie à la profondeur de la pensée.*»<sup>524</sup>

In its Persian rhyming prose and the rhythmic quatrains, the *Munājāt* speak of the wisdom of a searching and at times disheartened and yet hopeful mystic. Readers meet a Ṣūfī shaykh “who pours out his feelings in the presence of the Lord like little sighs, for the rhythm of these prayers is like breathing in its constant change of contraction and expansion.”<sup>525</sup> These intimate prayers became the companion of de Beaurecueil in and out of seasons. He would comment on, rely upon and take comfort in the most exquisite sayings. He would agree with Schimmel that the *Munājāt*, “... offer a perfect code of life: complete trust in God, deep faith in His grace and awareness of His justice, and an insight into His mysterious working through the contrasting manifestation of this created world.”<sup>526</sup> These luminous aphorisms bring together superb poetic skills and transcend time, culture and even language.

### ***1 Textual history***

More than any other work attributed to the master, the textual history of the *Munājāt* is very problematic. There is no or little textual continuity between the master's original text and the edited copies known to scholars today.<sup>527</sup> Thackston summarizes best the situation: “It is probably safe to say that no two printed versions of the *Munājāt* agree with regard to the material included. Some are significantly longer; others markedly

<sup>524</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 120.

<sup>525</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, xiii.

<sup>526</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, xiv.

<sup>527</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 26.

whittled-down.”<sup>528</sup> These collections challenge seriously our modern understanding of authorship. The popularity of the *Munājāt* was a mixed blessing. On the one hand the text is found in superb calligraphic and ornamented manuscripts, and these popular and commercial pamphlets are scattered all over both the Persian and Arab worlds. But on the other hand, their popularity led to multiple editions and corrections by successive scribes and calligraphers. In the words of Bo Utas: “After all, these changes in the textual tradition show to what extent the texts have been alive all through the nine centuries that have passed since the death of Anṣārī.”<sup>529</sup>

In the introduction to his translation of the *Munājāt*, Thackston observes that if one judges by content alone, irrespectively of style, some part of the book cannot be ascribed to the master but to elements common to later mystical thought.<sup>530</sup> On the basis of the surviving manuscripts of works such as *Ṣad maydān* and *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*, de Beaurecueil concludes that the master dictated and taught in Herāti. Anṣārī’s *Munājāt* share with a few other famous works the authenticity problem. For example, the so-called ‘wandering quatrains’ of ‘Umar Khayyām are probably the most famous case in point.<sup>531</sup> The multiplicity of copies and manuscripts makes it almost impossible to trace the original text. Speaking about the *Munājāt*, Thackston remarks that:

The dialectal peculiarities, however, have been normalized by successive copyists and redactors, who, typical of premodern litterateurs on the Perso-Arabic tradition, did not hesitate to make corrections, and emendations, not to speak of additions, in

<sup>528</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 178. In addition to de Beaurecueil’s French translation, *Cris du Coeur*, there are the following English ones: Sardar Sir Jogendra Singh, *The Invocations of Sheikh ‘Abdullāh Anṣārī of Herāt, A.D. 1005 - 1090*; Arthur Arberry, “Anṣārī’s Prayers and Counsels,” *Islamic Culture*, no. 10, 369 - 389; *Munājāt: The Intimate Prayers of Khwāja ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī*, trans. Lawrence Morris and Rustam Sarfeh (New York: Khanegha and Maktab of Maleknia Naseralishah, 1975).

<sup>529</sup> Bo Utas, “The *Munājāt* ...” *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, 87.

<sup>530</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 175.

<sup>531</sup> Edward FitzGerald’s *rubā’īyāt of Omar Khayyām*, (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1899) and J. T. P. de Bruijn’s *Of Piety and Poetry. The Interaction of Religion and Literature in the Life and Works of Hakīm Sana’i of Ghazna*. (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 113 - 118. Many classical mystical writings attributed to seminal Ṣūfī masters share a similar problem of authenticity.

accordance with their personal taste. The result is a collection of prose sentences, characteristically rhymed, the ascription of which to the Pīr of Herāt rests on a certain historical basis but to which later accretions have adhered.<sup>532</sup>

Bo Utas describes in detail the difficulty of ascertaining the continuity in the textual tradition of the *Munājāt* in his article and notes that in the case of Anṣārī, the question of authorship is even more complicated. He concludes: “Generally there is only partial, or no, continuity to hold on to in the bewildering mass of material. These texts have, no doubt, grown and changed incessantly during the centuries.”<sup>533</sup> De Beaurecueil echoes Bo Utas’s concern and explains further his methodological approach to maintaining continuity in the textual tradition of the *Munājāt*:

*Si Anṣārī doit à ses Étapes d’avoir été connu dans le monde arabe, ce sont les Oraisons or Munājāt qui ont fait sa célébrité dans le monde persan. Au cours de leur diffusion, elles ont souvent fait peau neuve; elles ont aussi fait boule de neige... Pour éviter de présenter ici des textes peut-être fort beaux mais d’authenticité douteuse, nous avons borné notre choix à quelques passages cités dans les Générations. Le style et la pensée en sont difficiles, mais ils illustrent admirablement le caractère, la pensée et le talent du Maître. Ni littérature, ni mièvreries, mais une expérience qui cherche à se formuler au gré des rythmes, des rimes et des images, par vagues successives, de façon plus personnelle que dans les œuvres didactiques. C’est là qu’il faut aller pour ‘rencontrer’ Anṣārī.*<sup>534</sup>

Interestingly enough, the collection of the *Munājāt* as we know it today has been added to and subtracted from by various copyists who, fortunately, did improve the texts. These various scribes cleared frequent archaic words, phrases, idioms and expressions from the early compositions which had made some passages difficult for readers to understand in regard “to phonetics, morphology and semantics.”<sup>535</sup> As Thackston observes, “if we were to edit out all that is obviously (and subtlety) not the words of Khwāja ‘Abdullāh, we would

<sup>532</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 175; de Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 288.

<sup>533</sup> Bo Utas “The *Munājāt* ...,” 84 - 85. Bo Utas, Thackston and de Beaurecueil agree that the *Munājāt* have been printed and edited many times and under different titles.

<sup>534</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Khwādja*, 287; Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 175.

<sup>535</sup> Farhādī, *‘Abdullāh*, 116.

lose much of value and beauty.”<sup>536</sup> Also, if we abandon anachronism in terms of authorship and realize that in oral culture memorization is thought to be more reliable than writing, modern readers might avoid sterile criticism of the textual authenticity of the texts under consideration. Hence, it would be wise to recognize a certain authenticity to most of the manuscripts, even the later ones, and not to dismiss them all at once.

Nonetheless, the changes in the textual tradition are nothing compared to the damage resulting from the translation from Persian to European languages as many translators bemoaned. The rhymed prose of these intimate conversations is the main reason for their great popularity in the Persian speaking world, and as Farhādī puts it, “The esthetic and psychological effects of such assonance are, unfortunately, lost in translation.”<sup>537</sup> Both Thackston and de Beaurecueil lament the impossibility of translating the *saj* ‘ literary style and many peculiar Persian idiomatic expressions into English or French. Thackston writes:

Anṣārī’s sentences appear to be the essence of stylistic simplicity, yet masked by the brevity and conciseness of expression is a considerable amount of subtle rhetorical play. The parallelism and internal rhyme characteristic of so many of the prose sentences are devices impossible to recapture in translation. Extensive use is made of the rhetorical device known as *tarsī*, where the sequence of vowels in two or more parallel lines is exactly the same, with only the consonants varying.<sup>538</sup>

## **2: Literary and Spiritual acumen**

In his French translation based on earlier manuscripts and not on commercial pamphlets, de Beaurecueil notes that «*Anṣārī procède à la fois comme un peintre et comme un musicien: par touches successives et par déroulement de la mélodie.*»<sup>539</sup> The images used by the master are related to a number of major themes: journey, light, water, vegetation, fire, commerce and gain, life and death, suffering and illness, joy and feast, the

<sup>536</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 178.

<sup>537</sup> Farhādī, *‘Abdullāh*, 115.

<sup>538</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ illāh*, 176.

<sup>539</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 29.

Royal Court, food and drink, justice, war, lamentation and tears.<sup>540</sup> There are also other less important, isolated themes or images used sporadically by the master, such as, guilt, breath, smell, touch etc.<sup>541</sup> The study of these images and themes led de Beaurecueil to conclude that

*Si l'on compare les images, dont nous venons de faire l'inventaire, à celles qui illustrent Les Étapes des Itinérants, on est frappé par leur coïncidence. Les grands thèmes sont identiques: le voyage, la lumière et l'eau à laquelle se rattache la végétation. Voilà qui milite en faveur de l'authenticité des textes que nous avons choisis.*<sup>542</sup>

The master's thought focuses on searching for and finding God, the divine decree and its consequences, the love of God, the memory of God, the friends of God and a question, "who am I?" repeated many times as a leitmotiv.<sup>543</sup> These aspects anchor his teachings in a constant effort to describe for his disciples the subtle and yet powerful intimate relationship between God and the wayfarer. His thought in the *Munājāt* is in perfect agreement with his didactic and spiritual manuals. Here, the tone of the conversation is intimate and at times austere or sober. The master speaks freely and his fierce temperament comes through. He instills in the very structure of his writing a theology. The text is built on a repetitive opening phrase: "O God!" It is an intimate utterance and a sign of nearness to God. The text is full of redundancy, paradoxes, and association of opposite terms and images. De Beaurecueil takes seriously these paradoxes and oppositions because they are the best representatives of the master's wisdom.<sup>544</sup> For example:

O God! People indicate how near You are, but You are loftier than that. People think how far You are, but You are much closer than the soul. You are found

<sup>540</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 25 - 41.

<sup>541</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 41 - 42.

<sup>542</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 42.

<sup>543</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 43 - 63.

<sup>544</sup> De Beaurecueil "La souffrance, mère de la joie?" *Vie Spirituelle*, no. 697, (décembre 1991): 485 - 497.

(*mawjūd*) in the spirit of Your champions, (for) You are present (*ḥāḍir*) in the hearts of those who mention Your Name.<sup>545</sup>

More explicitly, in the following excerpts the paradoxical language reaches its climax:

How could I have known that the mother of joy is sorrow, and that under every misfortune a thousand treasures are hiding? How could I have known that the desire is the bringer of Union, and that beneath the cloud of Munificence despair is impossible? How could I have known that the Possessor of Majesty is so comforting toward (His) devotees, and that the friends (of God) are so much favored by him? How could I have known that what I am searching for is in the midst of the soul, and that the honor of Your Union is for me an opening and a victory?<sup>546</sup>

*Comment aurais-je su que la vraie vie se trouve dans la mort, et que l'object de nos désirs se trouve tout entier dans l'absence de tout désir?*

*La vie, c'est la vie du coeur; la mort, c'est la mort de l'âme. Tant que tu ne mourras pas en toi, jamais tu ne vivras en Dieu. Meurs, mon ami, si tu veux vivre! Il a bien dit: «L'amour n'agrée pas plus l'âme vivante que le faucon ne chasse le rat mort. ».*

*Celui de qui Tu es la vie, comment pourrait-il mourir? Celui dont Tu es le tourment, son tourment quand pourrait-il finir? Toi qui es là et que l'on peut trouver! Il n'est de joie que par Ta connaissance, il n'est de vie que par Ta découverte. Celui qui vit sans Toi est comme un mort au fond de sa prison. Qui a trouvé Ta compagnie échappe à ce monde et à l'Autre.<sup>547</sup>*

Furthermore, Anṣārī's *Munājāt* celebrates the glory of God but seems to suggest the annihilation of the wayfarer as the ultimate goal. A close reading of the text shows that each passage is structured in the dialectic of the divine (You) and the human (I). God and God's servant are a sort of metaphor for each other. In fact, the servant is defined and qualified according to God's commands and human status before their Lord is fully realized. Fortunately, the wisdom and spiritual insights of the *Munājāt* seem to have managed to transcend obvious translation loss and give to non-Persian readers a compelling view of the Pīr-e ṭāriqat. The following excerpts are tangible examples of these flashes of grace or gemlike spiritual jewels from the master. The *Munājāt* are a successful attempt to

<sup>545</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 120 - 121. De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 72, no. 13. In our view, the master is echoing the Qur'ānic line which speaks of God being closer to human than their jugular vein.

<sup>546</sup> Farhādī, 'Abdullāh, 125. The French translation is found in de Beaurecueil, *Cris*, no. 28, 78

<sup>547</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, no. 56, 90.

put into words the ineffable encounter and conversation with the divine. A few samples of these gleaming gems of spiritual wisdom help make our point:

*Mon Dieu! C'est Toi qui a fait resplendir, sur les cœurs de ceux que Tu aimes, la lumière de Ton épiphanie. C'est Toi qui a fait s'écouler, au plus intime de leur être, les fontaines de Ton amour. C'est Toi qui a fait de ces cœurs Ton miroir et le lieu de la transparence. En eux Tu apparais et, en apparaissant, Tu as fait disparaître en eux les deux mondes... Tu étais tout et Tu es tout! Tu n'es pas loin, pour qu'on Te cherche, ni absent pour qu'on Te réclame; et on ne saurait Te trouver que par Toi-même.*<sup>548</sup>

*Mon Dieu! Combien merveilleux sont les jours que passent avec Toi Tes amis! Que noble est leur façon d'agir dans le désir de Ta vision! Combien sont heureux leurs discours sur le chemin de Ta recherche! Quelle vie magnifique est la leur à Ta cour!*<sup>549</sup>

In the agony suffered for you,  
the wounded find the scent of balm:  
The memory of you consoles the souls of lovers.  
Thousands in every corner, seeking glimpses of you,  
Cry out like Moses, "Lord, show me yourself!"  
I see thousands of lovers lost in a desert of grief,  
Wandering aimlessly and saying hopefully  
    "O God! O God!"  
I see breasts scorched by the burning separation from you;  
I see eyes weeping in love's agony.  
Dancing down the lane of blame and censure,  
your lovers cry out, "Poverty is my source of price!"  
Pīr-i Anṣārī has quaffed the wine of longing:  
Like Majnūn he wanders drunk and perplexed  
    through the world.<sup>550</sup>

O God,  
By Your primordial (pre-eternal) Compassion,  
You sowed the seeds of guidance;  
By sending prophets as messengers,  
You irrigated those seeds;  
By Your assistance and bounty, You grew them (and)  
By the Your regard, You enable them to bear fruit.  
O God,  
It is suitable that You protect them from the hot sandstorm

<sup>548</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 61.

<sup>549</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Cris*, 87, no. 50.

<sup>550</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn 'Aṭā' illāh*, 182.



Of (Your) coercion (*qahr*)  
 And that You nurture the seeds sown by Your pre-eternal  
 Bounty  
 With Your eternal care.<sup>551</sup>

O God  
 To converse with your friends is like cool water on the soul.  
 To converse with other than them is torment to the soul.

O God  
 The rose of Heaven is a thorn in the feet of mystics.  
 What cares he for Heaven who is searching for you?<sup>552</sup>

This chapter sought to examine primarily de Beaurecueil's (and other scholars') study and interpretation of the corpus attributed to Anṣārī with emphasis on a few seminal works. The Dominican friar's scientific assessment and textual criticism of the master's corpus is unparalleled in Western languages. Robert Caspar paid tribute to his scholarship in these words:

Serge de Beaurecueil has taken up the considerable task of editing and studying the whole of the thought of al-Anṣārī. During the first phase of his study he edited the commentaries on *The Book of Stages*, at least the two earliest ones. Then followed the critical edition of the text itself. The life of al-Anṣārī was studied in its historical context. Finally, various smaller works filling in the teaching of the master [were] edited. All this constitutes the scholarly aspect of the work of Serge de Beaurecueil. One can only admire him for the high quality of his scholarship: the investigation of manuscripts accessible only with difficulty (some of them have been found in Afghanistan in private libraries hitherto unexplored), the establishment of relationships between manuscripts and above all a meticulous concern for precision in the use of terms and ideas relating to the mystical experience of al-Anṣārī. It is indeed works as exacting as these that bring about progress in the study of Ṣūfism and make the elaboration of a valid, general view of Muslim mysticism possible.<sup>553</sup>

The authenticity questions surrounding the works attributed to the master should not cast excessive doubt on the real authorship of the corpus. Most scholars mentioned in this study admit that notwithstanding the multiple editions and additions on the part of various

<sup>551</sup> Farhādī, *ʿAbdullāh*, 122.

<sup>552</sup> Danner and Thackston, *Ibn ʿAṭāʾ illāh*, 191.

<sup>553</sup> Caspar, "Muslim Mysticism," *Studies*, ed., M. L. Swartz, 179

students and copyists, the corpus attributed to the master is largely accurate. The question of authorship must be understood in the context of 11<sup>th</sup> century Khurāsān and not in reference to any other period. The master's students, disciples and the general readership were concerned with the spiritual insights of the corpus and not with the exact wording of his teaching. Our study is a window through which the most important part of de Beaurecueil's scholarship can be assessed. The master's spiritual manuals, *Ṣad maydān*, *Manāzil*, *ʿIlal al-Maqāmāt*, and the *Munājāt* were for de Beaurecueil jewels of spiritual lessons, and he understood himself as much a disciple as a scholar of the master's work. No erudition on his part could conceal his deep affection for his patron saint. One can decipher a direct influence of the master's spirituality on his books, *Nous avons partagé le pain et le sel*; *Prêtre des non-Chrétiens*, and numerous articles in *Je crois à l'étoile du matin*.<sup>554</sup> Large part of these books and articles read like long poems trying to convey religious experiences otherwise impossible to articulate. His writings are not intended to give witness to a particular faith tradition. They offer luminous and impressive meditations on the hidden presence of God among Afghans. As André Gouzes puts it, «*Chaque page est l'ouverture d'un coeur désarmé devant l'innocence éternelle, celle qui recommence depuis les origines à travers un seul regard d'enfant rieur ou accablé.*» His writings paint the portrait of a man who seeks to live an authentic Dominican life in the most unlikely milieu. This chapter is also a springboard for the next. If the Dominican's friar life parallels the erudition of Massignon, it also encompasses the Ashramic spirituality of Henry Le Saux and Bede Griffiths, de Foucauld's desert experience among the Touaregs, and the ethical dimension of interfaith encounter, all these dimensions reach their summit in his twenty years of

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<sup>554</sup> The titles of his chapters are phrases taken from the bible or other spiritual poems. These books are not theological lectures but narratives of a spiritual journey, of human encounters and an attempt to give voice to an ordinary life lived under extraordinarily circumstances.

pastoral ministry in Kabul, from 1963 - 1983. The next chapter examines the embodiment of this mystical praxis with its intractable difficulties and hope.

## Chapter IV Via Unitiva

*Parler la langue de mon peuple..., non point seulement pour partager leur vie, leurs peines et leur joies, mais pour prier aussi. Et point seulement dans l'oraison, mais dans la grande prière de l'Église, pour célébrer l'Eucharistie... Même si aucun d'eux n'est présent pour entendre, pour acquiescer: à Nazareth, Jésus priait pour ceux que le Père lui avait donnés, bien avant même de les avoir rencontrés... Prier avec leurs mots, chanter avec leurs mélodies, simplement pour que leur langage et leur chant soient désormais ceux de Jésus et deviennent pour eux sacrements du salut ... Simplement pour que le mot nān, prononcé par eux tant de fois, désigne le Pain de vie; pour que le mot padar s'adresse au Père des cieux ... Simplement pour que, par mes lèvres, ils parlent la langue de Dieu...*<sup>555</sup>

*La religion tranquillise, la foi inquiète. La religion soumet aux règles de pensées, d'action, de liturgie, reçues de la tradition, même lorsqu'elles sont d'une autre époque et n'ont plus pour nous aucun sens, alors que la foi nous libère, exigeant de nous un engagement toujours nouveau envers Celui qui était certes, mais surtout qui est et qui vient ... pour guider mes pas dans la nuit, et m'importe les lampes héritées des ancêtres? J'attends l'Étoile du matin.*<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 59.

<sup>556</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 19.

On August 31<sup>st</sup> 1983, de Beaurecueil was evacuated under the pretext of medical reasons from Kabul to Paris. He arrived completely exhausted at the priory of the Annunciation. This grim physical state echoed his tragic departure which in turn symbolized a disastrous end of his love affair with the Afghan people and the land of Anṣārī. The disaster of Afghan civil and the friar's dreadful departure in august 1983 stood in stark contrast to the enthusiasm of his arrival in Kabul. Indeed, on October 11, 1955, de Beaurecueil arrived for the first time in Kabul –*ce fut les fiançailles*– then he returned in 1962 at the celebration of the 900<sup>th</sup> lunar anniversary of Anṣārī's death –*ce fut les épousailles*.<sup>557</sup> His Afghan journey was an upward mobility in mystical intuition and *praxis* but also a downward mobility in terms of mystical erudition. In other words, he became less and less concerned with scholarly work of an orientalist, such as editing ancient manuscripts, annotations, translations and commentaries on the master's works, publishing books on mystical Islam; rather, he was more and more attuned to the *praxis* of a spiritual life, the day to day meaning of human encounters or the practice of everyday life.<sup>558</sup> This unusual movement seemed strange to many close observers and friends. In an article written in the honor of Louis Massignon, de Beaurecueil explained himself:

*Cher Louis Massignon, je ne suis plus orientaliste. Rien qu'un petit professeur de rien du tout, ayant quitté la recherche pour l'enseignement en Faculté, la Faculté pour le secondaire, et sur le point d'abandonner le secondaire pour le primaire . Le savant que vous étiez eût peut-être, dans un premier mouvement, déploré cette manière peu ordinaire de progresser... Mais l'homme de Dieu, le prophète, le serviteur, que vous étiez, eût approuvé sans doute la voie insolite qui est désormais la mienne, cette voie jalonnée de stèles brisées pour ne plus indiquer que le Ciel...*<sup>559</sup>

<sup>557</sup> I am borrowing Mérigoux's description of de Beaurecueil first and second journeys to Kabul. «Un mystique dominicain ...», » *Sources*, Nov. - Dec. 2005. See also de Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 40 where he refers to his first trip as '*fiançailles*.'

<sup>558</sup> Michel de Certeau uses the same phrase with a different meaning. *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>559</sup> De Beaurecueil «À propos d'une stèle brisée ...», » in *L'Herne: Louis Massignon*, ed. J. Fr. Six, 419.

De Beaurecueil's mystical conversation with the Pīr of Herāt combined inter-spirituality (both Christian and Islamic mystical traditions) with inculturation. His attachment to people, particularly children living in dire socio-economic situations in the midst of a beautiful and yet devastated country tested his core identity as a friar and a priest, and led him to travel unthought roads and re-imagine what it meant to be faithful" to the essentials – the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of faith.<sup>560</sup> He strove to craft a genuine religious life which was Christian in faith but Afghan in culture. This process demanded a slow and careful method of integration and re-evaluation of his vocation as a friar preacher. Kabul street children were the greatest gift of his life and the most painful and formative aspect of his mystical journey. The living encounter between Christianity and Islam took place at the *Maison d'Abraham*, where he attempted to offer hospitality and to share 'bread and salt' with the descendants of the Pīr of Herāt. His adventure uncovered a deep understanding of how mysticism and *praxis* converged together in the depths of contemplative consciousness, in the deepest dimension of Islam and Christianity. The convergence in de Beaurecueil's case went beyond the speculative, theological levels to settle on the level of spiritual life and practice. He observed:

*Le soufisme m'a conduit en Afghanistan, et l'Afghanistan m'a contraint d'abandonner le soufisme, pour d'autres recherches, plus vitales, non plus dans les livres, mais dans le service banal et quotidien des hommes, dans la grisaille où toutes les stèles, aussitôt élevées, sont impitoyablement brisées pour ne plus indiquer que le Ciel.*<sup>561</sup>

In order to explore de Beaurecueil's *praxis mystica*, this chapter focuses on three major books: *Un Chrétien en Afghanistan*, *Mes enfants de Kabul* and *Je crois à l'étoile du matin*. These books are portraits of de Beaurecueil's life as a friar preacher in a land he will learn to love and cherish. This investigation is a window into his spirituality or mystical

<sup>560</sup> De Beaurecueil, "Être fidèle à quoi ... ?" in *Je crois*, 35 - 37.

<sup>561</sup> De Beaurecueil, *L'Herne*, ed. J. F. Six, 419.

theology which is Catholic and Dominican in scope, dialogical in commitment, intuitive and yet practical in its goal. The first section points to two aspects of de Beaurecueil's life which are congruent with the Gospel. The second section focuses on *Un Chrétien en Afghanistan* and the third on *Mes enfants de Kabul*. His book, *Je crois en l'étoile du matin*, permeates all sections. This chapter examines a pastoral expression of a mystical life. Mysticism in this case is not 'being alone with the Alone' away from worldly affairs, or giving oneself to hours of silent meditation, or writing and pontificating on apophatic and kataphatic poems and prose. For de Beaurecueil, mysticism is plunging into the deep and frigid water of the daily life of downtrodden children. It means feeding, clothing, educating and providing health care for them independent of any organized church structure. In addition, there are scattered and very few explicit references to Anṣārī's work and life in this chapter, largely due to the fundamental Christian nature of the subject matter: prophetic life form, priest, celebrant, pastor, servant. Nonetheless, de Beaurecueil's daily morning and evening prayers, and Eucharistic celebration were times to recite and meditate upon some of the master's poems from the *Munājāt* and spiritual instructions from *Ṣad maydān*, *Manāzil* and other poems from the master's dīwān.<sup>562</sup> He integrated the most striking poems and spiritual lessons into his breviary and liturgical life. The Dominican friar's prayer and worship was nourished by the master's teachings. A clear sign of the omnipresence of a master-teacher mystical conversation. In so many ways the master's spiritual legacy became the sap of the tree or the oil of the burning lamp. Our investigation paints the picture of the tree or the lamp; the sap and the oil are invisible but they have nourished de Beaurecueil's spiritual, mystical and pastoral life in Kabul.

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<sup>562</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Kwādja*, 302 - 308. A selection of the master's Arabic and Persian collections of poems.

## *I Jesus' Pastoral Mysticism*

If de Beaurecueil's *via illuminativa* parallels Louis Massignon's trajectory, his *via unitiva* is reminiscent of the Ashramic spirituality<sup>563</sup> and the path of Charles de Foucauld (d. 1921). This section explores the mystical intuition at the root of de Beaurecueil's journey, who chose to live an authentic Christian religious life in the context of both religious and cultural otherness. Following the content of his book, *Prêtre des non-Chrétiens*, this section will explore the following themes: the prophet, the celebrant, the servant and the pastor.

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<sup>563</sup> The Ashramic spirituality is part of a larger movement toward an Asian form of Christianity which started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with two Jesuits, Mateo Ricci (d. 1610) in China and Roberto de Nobili (d. 1656) in India. These religious men attempted a genuine 'indigenization' of Christianity in both places. They sought to conceive Catholic Christianity in an Asian worldview, away from a Greco-Roman or Latin Catholicism. Ricci mastered Mandarin and de Nobili Sanskrit and Tamil, and they lived entirely according to Chinese and Indian customs respectively, thus providing a model for inculturation of Christianity in Asia. The Ashramic movement per se was the fruit of de Nobili's spiritual intuition. His most significant successors are to be found in the ashram movement in India. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the effort of a rebellious and complicated brahmin, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (d. 1907), to establish a contemplative community which would become the source of hindu-Catholic spirituality echoed de Nobili's endeavor. Brahmabandhab Upadhyay was first baptized by an Anglican priest but later converted to Catholicism. He was Hindu by birth and culture, and Christian by faith. See Julius J. Lipner, *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Timothy C. Tennent, *Building Christianity on Indian Foundation: The Legacy of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*, (London: ISPCK, 2000). Arguably, the most famous pioneers in Hindu-Christian spirituality were two French men Abbé Jules Monchanin (d. 1957) and Henry Le Saux (d. 1973). They brought Nobili's and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay's thought to fruition. These two Benedictine monks founded the ashram of Shantivanam in Tamil Nadu, giving it the name of Saccidananda Ashram, and there the movement toward inculturation took roots. Finally, Dom Bede Griffiths, an English Benedictine monk brought this movement to its apogée and to a global visibility. Bede Griffiths noted that Monchanin "has left behind the witness of an ideal, like that of Nobili and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay which it seems to me can only grow in its significance as the years go by." quoted by James Conner, OCSO, "Jules Monchanin" *Bulletin* 51, October 1994. See also Jules Monchanin and Henri le Saux; *A Benedictine Ashram* (Isle of Man (UK): Time Press, 1964). Bede Griffiths, *The Golden String: An Autobiography*. (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1980) and *The One Light: Bede Griffiths' Principal Writings*, ed. Bruno Barnhart (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publisher, 2001). Also, Shirley du Bouley, *Beyond the Darkness: A Biography of Bede Griffiths*. (New York: Doubleday, 1998). The author tracks Bede's Ashramic spirituality and life. The works of the Ashramic fathers from Monchanin to Bede Griffiths are excellent sources of their distinctive attempt to live a genuine Christian life which espouses the Hindu culture of India. See Monastic Interreligious Dialogue's website for biographies and bibliographies about these pioneering figures. The Ashramic spirituality and the Hindu-Christian dialogue did meet resistance from the Vatican and among some religious communities. De Nobili and the Ashramic spiritual fathers were regarded with suspicion by the Roman Curia. Ricci was condemned for going too far in his integration of Chinese culture and the Roman watchdogs were very nervous about the entire Ashramic spirituality. It is a wonder that Monchanin, Le Saux, and Bede Griffiths were not officially condemned. They managed to craft a delicate meeting point between Catholic faith and Hindu culture.



## 1 A Prophetic Life <sup>564</sup>

In his book *Un Chrétien en Afghanistan*, de Beaurecueil lays out his definition of the prophetic life form:

*Un prophète, quoi qu'on en pense, ce n'est pas un devin; c'est un porte-parole. C'est Dieu qui le choisit et c'est Dieu qui l'envoie, lui 'mettant dans la bouche' ce qu'il doit dire, lui dévoilant ce qu'il doit voir, lui prescrivant ce qu'il doit faire. Le drame est qu'il s'agit d'un homme, et que Dieu aime trop les hommes et les respecte trop pour réduire son envoyé à l'état d'automate ou de magnétophone ... La Parole, il lui faut d'abord l'écouter, la recevoir, la 'dévorer', pour parler comme Jérémie (Jr. 15, 16); et il arrive bien souvent qu'elle ne soit guère à son goût ...*<sup>565</sup>

The remarkable and unique character of de Beaurecueil's life in Kabul combines aspects of two distinctive spiritualities and the ethical dimension of religious dialogue. He traveled a path of an authentic Christian mystic among Muslims. As John Henry Newman described them, de Beaurecueil was one of those:

who live in a way least thought of by others, the way chosen by [Jesus of Nazareth], to make headway against all the power and wisdom of the world. It is a difficult and rare virtue, to mean what we say, to love without deceit, to think no evil, to bear no grudge, to be free from selfishness, to be innocent and straightforward ... simple hearted. They take everything in good part which happens to them, and make the best of everything. (homily, Feast of St. Bartholomew)<sup>566</sup>

Even though every comparison is ephemeral and limited, we will argue, as noted earlier, that de Beaurecueil's attempt to live a genuine religious life in Kabul parallels the

<sup>564</sup> Anṣārī's corpus does not deal with the concept of prophethood (*nubuwwa*) as understood in Islamic theology. Prophethood and prophetic action in this chapter are best described by the following Christian and Jewish scholars: Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, (New York: HperCollins Books, 2001); Walter Brueggemann's *The Prophetic Imagination*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); John. Dear's *Jesus the Rebel* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: 2000) and *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings*; (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009); Gustavo Gutierrez's *The Power of the Poor in History*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983); Michael H. Crosby, *Can Religious be Prophetic?* (New York: Crossroad Publications, 2005). As Crosby writes "Authentic prophecy flows from the mystical experience; the mystical experience is empty without its proclamation in prophecy," 15. De Beaurecueil's life journey and writings are congruent with these Christian writers' understanding of prophetology, and differ from the concept of *nubuwwa* in Islamic tradition. To be certain, prophethood in this chapter unites servanthood in the sense of caring for the most vulnerable in a given community: Kabul street children.

<sup>565</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 91.

<sup>566</sup> Quoted by Pascaline Coff, O.S.B. "Man, Monk, Mystic, [www.bede-griffiths.com](http://www.bede-griffiths.com) (visited on sept 22, 2010)

Ashramic spirituality in India and Charles de Foucauld's imitation of Jesus in Tamanrasset among the Tuareg of Hoggar. These religious men would agree with Sandra Schneiders<sup>567</sup> that, "Jesus was extraordinarily 'unattached,' he had no family to provide for or to protect. He owned no personal property that he could lose. He held no official position of power, political or ecclesial, that his actions could jeopardize."<sup>568</sup> Faithful to Jesus' life, these men are but a few examples of what Schneiders again calls "Religious life as a prophetic life form."<sup>569</sup> The thrust of their lives was a participation in the prophetic mission of Jesus of Nazareth rather than a support system for an ecclesial power structure. Schneiders sees three main prophetic characters in Jesus' life:

First, Jesus' prophetic vocation was rooted in and expressive of his mystical life, the intense contemplative prayer life that the Gospels present as the roots of his experiential knowledge of God.

A second requirement of prophetic identity and mission is a certain freedom from attachments which pressure the person to prefer personal and institutional goods, the maintaining of the status quo within which one's own position and interests are protected, to God's interests or good of those to whom one is sent.

Third, a major non-negotiable criterion of the true prophet is the coherence between the prophet's message and the prophet's life.<sup>570</sup>

Indeed, these religious men tried to imitate Jesus' detachment from worldly affairs, but there were differences between them. The Ashramic spirituality sought to produce a Hindu-Christian monk;<sup>571</sup> de Foucauld, on his part, lived a semi-hermit and monk life style whereas de Beaurecueil shared his abode with orphans and Kabul street children at the

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<sup>567</sup> Sandra Schneiders is a member of the religious order "Immaculate Heart of Mary" and has written a three volume work entitled, *Religious Life in a New Millennium*. Also the *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR) published a five-part essay entitled, "Religious Life as a Prophetic Life Form." In these articles and interviews Schneiders describes Jesus as a prophet and remarks that the call and task of prophetic action in 'Religious Life as a Prophetic Life Form' of those who choose the prophetic life style. These articles ran from January 4 to 8, 2010 on NCR website. Other articles on NCR's website were posted on Feb 27, 2009; August 17, 2009; September, 11, 2009; December 9, 2009.

<sup>568</sup> Schneiders, "What Jesus taught us about his prophetic ministry" *NCR*, Jan 6, 2010

<sup>569</sup> Schneiders, *NCR*, Jan. 04, 2010.

<sup>570</sup> Schneiders, *NCR*, Jan 6, 2010

<sup>571</sup> Dupuis, *Jesus*, 69 and Brown, *Theology*, 143 – 156.

*Maison d'Abraham* where chaos ruled the day and the night.<sup>572</sup> There were irreducible differences among these religious men's experiences, but their lives shared a common denominator which was "Call, response and the task of prophetic action,"<sup>573</sup> but of course with its flaws and human shortcomings.

On the one hand, de Beaurecueil shared with the Ashramic founders a zeal for sacramental and liturgical adaptation to their respective cultural contexts. This effort to think, act, pray and ritualize religious experience according to the local cultural patterns is what the Vatican II Council and Catholic theologians would call 'inculturation' (*Gaudium et Spes* numbers 44 and 58).<sup>574</sup> The conciliar document reads:

There are many ties between the message of salvation and human culture. For God, revealing Himself to His people to the extent of a full manifestation of Himself in His Incarnate Son, has spoken according to the culture proper to each epoch.

Likewise the Church, living in various circumstances in the course of time, has used the discoveries of different cultures so that in her preaching she might spread and explain the message of Christ to all nations, that she might examine it and more deeply understand it, that she might give it better expression in liturgical celebration and in the varied life of the community of the faithful.

But at the same time, the Church, sent to all peoples of every time and place, is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, any particular way of life or any customary way of life recent or ancient. Faithful to her own tradition and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, she can enter into communion with the various civilizations, to their enrichment and the enrichment of the Church herself.

The Gospel of Christ constantly renews the life and culture of fallen man, it combats and removes the errors and evils resulting from the permanent allurements of sin. It never ceases to purify and elevate the morality of peoples. By riches coming from above, it makes fruitful, as it were from within, the spiritual qualities and traditions of every people of every age. It strengthens, perfects and restores(6) them in Christ. Thus the Church, in the very fulfillment of her own function,(7) stimulates and advances human and civic culture; by her action, also by her liturgy, she leads them toward interior liberty.<sup>575</sup>

<sup>572</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 49 - 50.

<sup>573</sup> Schneiders, *N.C.R.*, Jan. 04, 2010.

<sup>574</sup> See Karl Starkloff, s.j., "Inculturation and Cultural systems," Part 1 and 2, *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 67 - 81 and 275 - 294.

<sup>575</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, no .58.

In a letter to the Society of Jesus in 1978, Pedro Arrupe (d. 1991), the late Jesuit General, defines the terms as:

... the incarnation of Christian life and the Christian message in a particular context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs, and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about 'a new creation.'<sup>576</sup>

On the other hand, similar to de Foucauld, de Beaurecueil chose the hidden life of Christ among Muslims. In the light of Arrupe's definition, the questions are: how does one live an authentic Christian religious life in an alien land? What kind of liturgical and sacramental practice would be appropriate in Kabul? De Beaurecueil's Christian faith and religious life are experienced in the primary context of utter otherness and challenge of Christian tenets of faith. In this case, observes Barnes, "Christian subjectivity [and personhood] are formed both by a faithful repetition of the language of faith and by a hopeful facing of an irreducible other. But it is not all obvious how the two can hold together without covertly subsuming the latter within the former."<sup>577</sup>

In their case, the fathers of the Ashramic spirituality established a contemplative community which would become the source of the Hindu-Catholic spirituality. They were persuaded that their theology must be founded not just on Indian thought-forms but on a properly Indian life-style as well. In addition, the sophisticated philosophical and theological traditions of Hinduism presented opportunities and difficulties quite different from the Islamic milieu of Kabul. Nonetheless, both the Ashramic founders and de Beaurecueil fit well what Brown terms a "Missionary practice from 'a place' of weakness"<sup>578</sup> or a "Spirituality and the practice of inculturation."<sup>579</sup> In both cases, there was

<sup>576</sup> *Acta Romana*, 17, 1978, 256 - 81.

<sup>577</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 136.

<sup>578</sup> Brown, *Theology*, 151.

<sup>579</sup> Brown, *Theology*, 153.

a need to exercise a certain passivity before the religious and cultural other, to understand and be understood, and above all to relinquish a position of domination and be prepared to listen and respond with the warm appreciation and the discretion that characterize the good guest. These religious men sought a creative and dynamic relationship between their Christian faith and practice (orthopraxis) with their hosts' cultural and religious sensitivities. The founding members of the Indian-Catholic Ashram and de Beaurecueil made a deliberate choice to live their Christian faith in India or in Kabul and tried to inculturate their sacramental and liturgical life to the best of their abilities. In both cases, the religious and cultural other set the parameters of their religious experience. They had to learn to incorporate a world view which was not always evident and most often challenged all that they had taken for granted. Likewise, these two Catholic religious men's experiences shared in common the refusal to dichotomise theology and spirituality or religious practice. The practice of inculturation was an illustration of adaptability to the context of religious and cultural otherness. Such a missionary position from 'a place of weakness' represented a conversation, a self-awareness in the face of the other as it became a border-crossing, moving over the threshold into the world of Islam or Hinduism. It was also the experience of waiting and learning within the restrictions set by the religious other. These religious men understood that without a personal adaptation of their lives to the ideal and spiritual values embedded in the local genius, their Christian testimony was likely to be ineffective. Hence, their examples were significant for the post-conciliar Church in that they embodied those qualities and dispositions of faith demanded for a re-imagining of the preaching and living of the Gospel in a framework of religious and cultural otherness.

A caveat found in the Ashramic tradition, however, was the lack of social justice dimension. To go back to the first Jesuit de Nobili (d. 1656), he was regarded as someone

who did not challenge the Indian caste system and untouchability concept at the heart of the Brahmin worldview. Barnes writes, “Today, de Nobili’s gets mixed press in India, regarded by some as the prophet of Vatican II, by others as a forger and charlatan who encouraged caste and untouchability.”<sup>580</sup> Also, there was more to Hinduism than the sophisticated philosophy of the *Vedanta* and more to the culture and social reality of India than the ritually ordered round of life in the villages. A contemporary Jesuit, Fr. Aloysius Pieris, scorned the Ashramic spirituality as being divorced from the economic and political reality of the mass of ordinary people. He lamented the lack of serious ethical dimension in the Ashramic tradition.<sup>581</sup> Brown noted about Pieris that, “He is as critical of what he sees as the naive Marxist-inspired activism of much ‘imported’ liberation theology as he is of an equally ‘foreign’ obsession with eastern mysticism.”<sup>582</sup> Likewise, George Soares believed that in a society as culturally diverse and socially divided as India, inculturation could only be achieved through a model of conversion. He concluded that Ashrams were just not suitable places for doing theology because they were still dominated by largely western concerns:

What are the Christian ashrams trying to do ... Are they trying to cure the sickness of a post-Christian Western society by giving them anti-consumerism values from a highly idealized ‘book’ Hinduism; or are they addressing themselves to a decaying Indian society in order to share with them the Christian experience of liberation and give them the healing values that Christianity has to offer?<sup>583</sup>

Those hard-hitting critiques of the Ashramic spirituality rightly question its lack of an ethical edge or its exclusive dialogue with high class Indian religious tradition which was

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<sup>580</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 146.

<sup>581</sup> Aloysius Pieris, “An Asian Paradigm: Interreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions,” *The Month* 26 (1993): 51 - 58.

<sup>582</sup> Brown, *Theology*, 155.

<sup>583</sup> Prabhu Soares, *Inculturation, Liberation, Dialogue*. (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1984). Also from a letter to the participants in the Ashramic Aikiya Satsang, November 1991, published as an appendix to Vandana 1993, 153 - 56. Barnes, *Theology*, 156.

blind to issues of social justice, class and caste inequality. After all, an inculturation with an acute ethical consciousness was (and is) simply faithful to the prophetic nature of the Gospels, even though, it made the engagement with the religious other much more difficult. De Beaurecueil's life in Kabul exemplified this latter description; in other words, he took seriously the ethical demands of religious dialogue and its pitfalls.

De Beaurecueil's life in Kabul captures the prophetic intuition of the life form and the charisma of his religious order. Indeed, it is the life form of the Dominican Order which is prophetic and not the individual religious themselves. Yet, a Dominican friar who embodies to the best of his ability the charisma of the order lives a prophetic life. Thus, de Beaurecueil is in the tradition of friars who bind a mystical intuition and a prophetic vocation such as Meister Eckhart (d. 1328), Johannes Tauler (d. 1361 ),<sup>584</sup> Girolamo Savonarola (d. 1498),<sup>585</sup> Pedro de Cordoba (d. 1525), Antonio de Montesino (d. 1545), Bartolomé de las Casas (d. 1566)<sup>586</sup> and Marie Dominique Chenu (d. 1990),<sup>587</sup> to name but a few. A prophetic religious life in this context is not about foretelling the future, predicting what will happen at a chronologically later date nor a person chosen and sent by God with a message, a book or a divine law to a particular community.<sup>588</sup> Prophetic

<sup>584</sup> See *Meister Eckhart: Teacher*; (New York: Paulist Press, 1981) and *John Tauler: Sermons* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

<sup>585</sup> *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola*, ed. Donald Bee, (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>586</sup> Antonio de Montesinos was noted for his exemplary piety, his love of strict observance, his eloquence, and moral courage. In September, 1510, under the leadership of Pedro de Cordova, he landed with the first band of Dominicans in Hispaniola. He was the first, in 1511, to denounce publicly in the Americas the enslavement and oppression of Native Americans as sinful and disgraceful to the Spanish nation. Being censured for this, he was cited to Spain in 1512, where he pleaded the cause of the Native people so successfully that the king took immediate measures towards ameliorating their condition. Bartolomé de las Casas followed A. de Montessino's path and was among the very few religious men and women who stood against the Conquistadores' slavocracy and genocidal practices. See Gustierrez, *Las Casas: in Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), and Vickery, *Bartolomé de las Casas: Great Prophet of the America*, (Peoria, IL: The Newman Press, 2006).

<sup>587</sup> *L'Hommage*, intro. Geffré. The Dominican Order produced remarkable friars even though the Order's participation in the inquisition was a tragic historical mistake.

<sup>588</sup> For a theological understanding of prophethood (*nubūwa*) in Islam, which is outside the scope of this chapter, see *Ibn Taymiyya: A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity*. ed. and trans. Thomas Michel, (Ann Arbor: Caravan Books, 2009), 137 - 210. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Chicago: University of Chicago

religious life like that of de Beaurecueil means an unwavering faith in proclaiming the absolute future of what the Gospel called “The Reign of God” into the present. Schneiders cautions that “no one claims that all ministerial religious are prophets or that religious life has any monopoly on the charism of prophecy in the Church.”<sup>589</sup> De Beaurecueil offers his own grasp on a prophetic life form:

*Mais que je me dise prophète, ah! ça, c'est une autre affaire! ... Les Musulmans ont des idées bien arrêtées sur la question: un type stéréotype de prophète, dont ils affirment qu'il ne se produira plus jamais, ce en quoi ce me semble ils ont raison ... Quant aux Chrétiens, ils croient pour la plupart que le temps des prophètes est achevé depuis longtemps, et que cela vaut mieux. ... Rares d'ailleurs sont ceux pour qui un Isaïe, un Jérémie, sont autre chose que des noms... Puisqu'il en est ainsi, coupant court aux méprises, j'abandonne le mot pour la réalité, et c'est par tout mon être que je prophétise, inspiré par l'Esprit de Vérité.*<sup>590</sup>

Prophetic religious life has to be understood as a life of witness to the challenging message of the Gospels, and to exercise truly a prophetic ministerial identity and spirituality. It does not mean a sheer spirit of revolt against the institutional church but prophetic religious life genuinely distinguishes between courage and temerity. The prophet speaks truth to powers and principalities within and without the Church community. This prophetic call is rooted in the charismatic experience of the founder or founders of religious orders, who felt compelled to give themselves to God and God's work in response to some historical pressing need. It is reported that the founder of the Order of Preachers St. Dominic of Guzmán (d. 1221), while a student in Palencia and during a severe famine, sold his books and school materials and gave the money to the poor who were dying of hunger.

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Press, 1979); Also see a remarkable essay by Wadad Kadi, “What is Prophecy? Reflection on a Qur'ānic Institution in History,” in *Bearing the Word*, ed. Michael Ipgrave. (New York: Church Publishing, 2005), 45 - 58.

<sup>589</sup> Schneiders, *NCR*, Jan. 4, 2010.

<sup>590</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 99.



He said “he did not want to study on dead hides while people were dying of hunger.”<sup>591</sup>

Likewise, de Beaurecueil abandons his scholarship for the sake of Kabul’s orphans, crippled and sick street children. The prophetic witness involves discerning and responding to what the Second Vatican Council calls “the signs of the times.” The Pastoral Constitution of the Church, *Gaudium et Spes* states, “... to carry out such task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.”<sup>592</sup>

For de Beaurecueil, the question was: what did the Gospel of the Reign of God mean or call for, demand, need in this situation [Kabul] of desperate ignorance and widespread poverty? Thus, to be faithful to the Dominican charism, de Beaurecueil understood that ministerial innovation and liturgical and sacramental creativity were not infidelity to his religiously originating charisma but rather, contextualization belonged to the very nature of his prophetic life form. He was precisely perceived as a prophet by many Afghans and others because he addressed the pressing situation in Kabul, publicly lamenting the street children’s suffering and dire poverty, and the current oppression of his Afghan Muslims’ entourage as contrary to the Reign of God. De Beaurecueil was not a humanitarian worker. He did not have an NGO to run or report to a particular organization. Hence, he had no or little connection to the wider NGO community in Kabul. Many foreigners were acquaintances and friends and not work related partner. He read ‘the signs of the times’ with courage and became a sign of the Reign of God himself, and an example of the good news to the downtrodden. (Is. 61:1-2; Lk. 4: 16-21). He notes:

*Le prophète serait un signe; il ne se contenterait pas d’en donner ... À le voir, les hommes serait acculés à choisir entre l’obscurité et la lumière, à révéler les*

<sup>591</sup> Marie-Humbert Vicaire, «Saint Dominique de Caleruega, d’après les documents du XIIIe siècle, » *Revue d’histoire de l’Église de France*, vol. 41 (1955): 300 – 04.

<sup>592</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 4.

*pensées de leur cœur ... Signe de ce qui est: de ce que Dieu les aime, au point de leur donner son Fils, pour qu'ils bâtissent leurs charpentes et pour qu'il arpente leurs routes, pour qu'il soulage leurs misères et pour qu'il partage leur pain, pour qu'il les convie au Royaume et pour qu'il leur lave les pieds, et pour qu'il souffre, et pour qu'il saigne, et pour que dans un grand cri, en leur nom et pour eux, il lui remette son esprit.*<sup>593</sup>

Finally, the Dominican friar was a prophet because he understood his religious life among Muslims as God's call to proclaim by his very life form the coming of the Reign of God. He acted out the universal compassion of God and bore witness to a practice of justice that would make God's compassion the normal state of affairs, God's reign on earth as it is in heaven. His life was rooted in the Dominican charism but not confined to the institution, nor restricted to his fellow Catholics nor aimed at the conversion of Afghans. Hence, his priestly and religious life for twenty years had to be read and interpreted through those lenses. De Beaurecueil drew a clear connection between his prophetic life style and his religious life. The practice of prayer and charity did not prevent him from assuming the prophet's role of speaking out against injustice. Above all, it was the prophetic life of Jesus of Nazareth and his priesthood which framed and defined his own. He noted,

*La mission est unique, et c'est celle du Fils, Prêtre et Prophète de tous et pour toujours ... Par la bouche de ceux qu'il envoie, et par leurs mains, et par leur être tout entier, c'est lui qui continue de parler et d'offrir, d'être présent et de mourir, et de ressusciter avec les hommes, et de les introduire dans le Royaume ... La vertu des envoyés, c'est d'être transparents, et c'est d'être si pauvres qu'ils n'aient plus rien que Lui-même ... En recevant l'imposition des mains, j'ai été prophétiquement consacré pour cela ... Que je le veuille ou non, possédé par l'Esprit, je suis prêtre et prophète, en Lui comme Lui ...*<sup>594</sup>

In Kabul, de Beaurecueil's prophetic life emulated also the anonymous life of the Nazarene.<sup>595</sup>

<sup>593</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 96.

<sup>594</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 98.

<sup>595</sup> The articles presented at «Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009» document clearly a life poured out in service to Afghans. The testimonies of other French expatriates, the Little Sisters of Jesus in Kabul and others who worked with him at Lycée Esteqlāl or the physicians who cared for the children at the *Maison d'Abraham*, all testify to his prophetic vision and ministry.

## 2 Hidden Jesus

Kabul was quite an unusual setting for a priest and a Dominican friar. One could argue that de Beaurecueil found himself in a place where the theology of priesthood in Christian tradition and his scholastic formation as a friar preacher seemed of little help. His seventeen years of erudite work on Anṣārī were far more useful than his Le Saulchoir years. This is not the place to do an exposé on Christian theology of priesthood<sup>596</sup> or religious life,<sup>597</sup> but we need to deal with these issues. The questions posed by de Beaurecueil's Kabul years must not be underrated; on the contrary, one must expose them to the light in order to follow de Beaurecueil's journey. How could he be "*prêtre des non-Chrétiens?*" in a country he described as «*Ni pays de Chrétienté (les Chrétiens sont tous des étrangers et presque tous sont de passage), ni pays de mission, tout prosélytisme y étant interdit.*»<sup>598</sup> How could he live an authentic Dominican life without a religious community? What about the theological incompatibilities between the two faith traditions? He became a friar preacher to live a conventual life, namely, common liturgy of the hours, Eucharist, study and community life. He recognize his awkward predicament:

*J'y pense souvent, moi qui, à dix-huit ans, avait choisi la vie dominicaine, en grande partie pour la liturgie, les observances, la vie conventuelle, et l'habit. ... y compris la rasure! À soixante ans, je suis servi: ni habit, ni observance, à plusieurs milliers de kilomètres de mon couvent (Beyrouth) que je n'ai pas revu depuis plusieurs années, noyé dans des activités purement 'profanes' ... Rien de ce que à quoi j'avais pensé, à part d'être au loin, en pays non-Chrétien. Et parfaitement 'bien dans ma peau' par dessus le marché! Serais-je infidèle?*<sup>599</sup>

<sup>596</sup> See David N. Power, O.M.I. "Priesthood in Christian Tradition," 1 – 48, ( to be published in the *NCE*) and Aelred Cody, O.S.B. "Priest and High Priest" in *Oxford Companion to Christianity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>597</sup> There are seminal books extremely useful to understanding the renewal of religious life proposed by Vatican II: Karl Rahner's *The Religious Life* (London: Burns and Oates Ltd., 1999); Johannes Metz's *Followers of Christ: The Religious Life and the Church*, (London: Burns and Oates Ltd., 1999); Jean Marie Roger Tillar, *Devant Dieu et pour le monde: le projet des religieux* (Paris: Cerf, 1974) and M. H. Crosby's *Can Religious Life be Prophetic?*

<sup>598</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 57.

<sup>599</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 35 - 36.

It seems that de Beurecueil in the midst of Muslims opted for the hidden life of Jesus , namely, the imitation of Jesus in Nazareth as the ideal form of religious life. In so doing he parallels the life of Charles de Foucauld among the Tourags of the Hogar.<sup>600</sup> Both religious men understood well that in his prophetic ministry, Jesus did not claim personal divine authority when he acted. He claimed to be speaking for God, and in the name of God. What would be the theological meaning of this hidden life?

Of course, a parallel reading of de Foucauld's life and de Beurecueil is a worthwhile adventure because both were Christian lives implanted in the heart of an Islamic land. Both men were very different and their itineraries seem to diverge. De Foucauld was a former military officer and an aristocratic Parisian agnostic whose dramatic return to the Catholic faith resembled more that of Massignon, his spiritual pupil. His encounter with Islam in North Africa had a profound effect on him. He was impressed by Muslims' constant repetition of the name of God, their prostrations in prayer in the open desert and by the overwhelming intonation of the call to prayer by the muezzin.<sup>601</sup> There is enough literature on de Foucauld's life and work among the Tuareg of Tamanrasset, and as Dominique Casajus remarks:

*Le flot ne s'est jamais tari jusqu'à aujourd'hui, charriant année après année, ces ouvrages qui ont appaissi plutôt que qu'éclaircir l'énigme d'une âme qu'on devine hantée par le tourment, l'intransigence et une sombre démesure. Charles de Foucauld a cependant suscité aussi quelques authentiques travaux d'historiens, qui depuis deux ou trois décennies ont répandu de lui une image complexe et plus humaine que l'icône un peu accreditée jusque-là par l'hagiographie.*<sup>602</sup>

<sup>600</sup> See Annie de Jésus, *Charles de Foucauld: sur les pas de Jésus de Nazareth* (Paris: Karthala, 2002); René Voillaume, *Seeds of the Desert* trans. Willard Hill. (Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers, 1964); Marguerite Catillon du Perron, *Charles de Foucauld* (Paris: Grasset, 1982).

<sup>601</sup> 'Alī Merad, *Christian Hermit in Islamic World. A Muslim View of Charles de Foucauld*, trans. Zoe Hersov, (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>602</sup> Dominique Casajus, *Charles de Foucauld, moine et savant* (Paris: CNRS, 2009.) (cover Jacquet). The author's critical reading of de Foucauld is an important corrective to the hagiographical tendencies found in many biographies. He pays much attention to how most authors have demonized the Tuaregs and elevated de Foucauld to a mythical figure. He brings a serious historical approach to the hermit of Hogar's life.

Unlike many biographers, Casajus does not focus on de Foucauld's path to holiness and martyrdom, but he investigates the relationship between the Tuaregs and the Christian hermit from August 1905 to December 1916. His book tries to answer the following questions: what was de Foucauld's self-consciousness or how did he understand himself? What kind of relationship did he have with the Tuaregs who saw him as an ally to the colonizer? How did language, and culture, and religion of the Tuaregs influence his life and work? What did the Tuaregs think about his religious practices of severe asceticism and celibacy? As Casajus notes, «*Ce qui est pour les uns l'ideal de la chasteté est pour les autres la honte d'une vie affranchie du devoir d'enfanter.*»<sup>603</sup> This crucial point underscores the cultural and theological gap that exist at times between these two faith traditions: Catholic religious ideals and Islamic ones. There are many biographies written by Christians about the Hoggar hermit, but there are very few views from Muslim authors. In addition, de Foucauld biographers do not always separate hagiographical material proper to Christian martyrology from serious historical questions surrounding the role of a French hermit living among defeated and colonized Tuaregs. 'Alī Merad, a Muslim and Algerian himself, seems to offers a fair and balanced approach to what he terms, "A Muslim's view of Charles de Foucauld."<sup>604</sup> There is no doubt that Merad's views are questionable at times, but his approach suits our need at this point.<sup>605</sup> He asserted that, "It is in the land of Islam, ..., that Charles de Foucauld felt, if not the irresistible outpouring of grace, at least the initial inner thrill that heralded the first movement of his soul toward the path of faith."<sup>606</sup>

Muslims' radical monotheism (*tawḥīd*) and sense of God's providence (*tawakkul*)

<sup>603</sup> Casajus, «Charles de Foucauld face au Touaregs,» *Revue d'ethnologie d'Europe*, 8.

<sup>604</sup> The full title of the book is, *Christian Hermit in Islamic World. A Muslim View of Charles de Foucauld*, trans. Zoe Hersov, (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).

<sup>605</sup> See Antoine Chatelard, *La mort de Charles de Foucauld*; (Paris: Karthala, 2000) and Josette Fournier, *Charles de Foucauld: amitiés croisées* (Paris: Cheminements, 2007)

<sup>606</sup> Merad, *Christian*, 44 - 45.

summoned him deeply. He confessed, “The sight of this faith, of these souls living in the continuous presence of God, has made me aware of something greater and truer than worldly preoccupation.”<sup>607</sup> For both the local Tuaregs and the French military, de Foucauld was regarded as a local French agent. Never, did he sever ties with his military past or his French nationalism. His devotion to the colonial army and French supremacy never abated. His life ended in apparent failure. He had made no converts and he left no successors. He waited in vain for Louis Massignon to join him in Tamanrasset. His rule of life for a new religious order existed only on paper.<sup>608</sup> None of these aspects were found in de Beaurecueil’s life.

However, de Foucauld and de Beaurecueil shared a key sense of Christian missiology, namely, a form of religious life in reference “to the mystery of Nazareth –the mystery of the Word assuming the life of the ‘little people’ who toil in the world and thus show forth respect, understanding and sensitiveness.”<sup>609</sup> They did not come to build hospitals, schools and churches or to convert Muslims. They did not come to live among the rich and powerful but among the poorest of the poor in Muslim lands. Both men were deeply impressed by the land and its inhabitants. Islam played a role in the blossoming of their spiritual vocation and the development of their religious awareness. De Beaurecueil described his kind of apostlehood in the land of Islam:

*Un envoyé de Dieu c’est autre chose ... On voudrait le voir arriver les mains vides mais tendues, disponibles pour travailler non point pour son clocher, mais pour l’oeuvre commune, non point pour s’imposer, mais pour servir ... On voudrait le voir arriver les mains vides, mais tendues, pour recevoir autant que pour donner, pour partager, pour embrasser et pour bénir ... On voudrait le voir arriver les mains vides, mais tendues, pour recueillir avec respect les grains épars, pour dégager tous les trésors enfouis dans le cœur des pauvres et prophétiquement les offrir. On voudrait le voir arriver les mains vides,*

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<sup>607</sup> Merad, *Christian*, 45.

<sup>608</sup> Merad, *Christian*, 8.

<sup>609</sup> Voillaume, *Seeds*, 6.

*mais tendues, s'offrant aux menottes et aux clous ... On voudrait le voir arriver si pauvre, si plein d'humilité, si rayonnant d'amour, si discret et si transparent, que sans qu'il soit besoin pour lui d'ouvrir la bouche, en lui on voie le Père (Jn 12 14; 14, 9) et déjà on présente qu'on est ses enfants...*<sup>610</sup>

De Beaurecueil recognized in the religious other the face of the infinite. He knew the Afghans did not lack a spirituality nor need another faith tradition to be saved. He understood that it is in giving that we receive. Robert Bédon, in his preface to *Prêtre des non-Chrétiens*, writes, «*Toi, tu leur donnes tout, et plus tu leur donnes, plus tu penses recevoir d'eux.*»<sup>611</sup> De Beaurecueil learned to respect the religious other regardless of their material poverty and/or physical handicap. The most important aspect of this encounter was to honor the irreducible difference of the religious other. De Beaurecueil chose to serve not an institution but people under the guidance of the Spirit of Truth. He wrote:

*Moi je préfère croire aux hommes, et à l'Esprit ..., car ce sont eux qu'il faut servir. C'est autrement plus difficile! Chaque homme est un mystère; l'Esprit souffle où il veut ... Il faut être attentif et être disponible, et faire siennes à chaque pas, comme il sied à un serviteur, les insondables voies de Dieu....*<sup>612</sup>

The hidden life of Jesus of Nazareth was the quiet and silent life before the beginning of his public ministry.<sup>613</sup> De Foucauld defined it in the following terms:

Jesus came to Nazareth, the place of the hidden life, of ordinary life, of family life, of prayer, work, obscurity, silent virtues, practices with no witnesses other than God, his friends and neighbors. Nazareth is the place where most people lead their lives. We must infinitely respect the least of our brothers. Let us mingle with them. Let us be one of them to the extent that God wishes and treat them fraternally in order to have the honor and joy of being accepted as one of them.<sup>614</sup>

And de Beaurecueil followed suit:

*Incarnée, la Parole de Dieu avait pris au sérieux le dire du vieux sage, commençant par se taire pendant trente ans, sans renoncer à sa mission pour autant. Le silence est peut être parfois le meilleur truchement du Message ...*

<sup>610</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 102.

<sup>611</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Prêtre des non-Chrétiens*, (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 11.

<sup>612</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 117.

<sup>613</sup> See "The mystery of Nazareth in the life of Brother Charles of Jesus," in Voillaume, *Seeds*, 13 - 23.

<sup>614</sup> Ellsberg «Charles de Foucauld,» in *Martyrs*, ed. Susan Bergman (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 297.

*Voilà que pour lui le silence était promu au rang de geste prophétique ... Il est des temps où le prophète doit parler et ce, quelles que soient les menaces, il en est d'autres où il lui faut savoir se taire, non point par lâcheté, mais parce que l'Esprit l'exige, au nom même de la Parole qu'il doit porter et qui ne doit pas être 'falsifiée.'<sup>615</sup>*

De Beurecueil and de Foucauld took seriously this hidden life of Jesus and used it as the framework of their spirituality among Muslims. Nazareth meant not just a hidden life lived in detachment from the world, a life of work behind the walls of a monastery, but a life amid the poor in the world. The mystery of Nazareth was understood by both men as to come and be, to dwell among others, to be seen first before being heard, to understand first before being understood. As de Foucauld put it “Your vocation is to shout the Gospel from the rooftops, not in words, but with your life.”<sup>616</sup> De Foucauld and de Beurecueil wanted to be among those who were the furthest removed, the most abandoned. They wanted all who drew close to them to find a brother, “a universal brother.”<sup>617</sup> They formed a kind of fictive kinship with Muslims in their respective settings. In a great respect for the culture and faith of those among whom they lived, their desire was to “shout the Gospel with their lives.”<sup>618</sup> De Foucauld writes, “I would like to be sufficiently good that people would say, ‘If such is the servant, what must the Master be like?’”<sup>619</sup>

Both religious men chose to listen, think and observe quietly for years in order that from their long pregnant silence comes forth the word of God in its purity. They lived a life of Christian compassion among Muslims. In Tamanrasset, villagers called de Foucauld a *marabout*, or a holy man, and in Kabul de Beurecueil was the *padar*. Their deep sense of solidarity and hope for the people they lived with explained the joy, peace and love which

<sup>615</sup> De Beurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 100.

<sup>616</sup> Robert Ellsberg, *Charles de Foucauld: Writings* (MaryKnoll: Obris Books, 1999), 68.

<sup>617</sup> Voillaume, *Seeds*, 121.

<sup>618</sup> This line echoes another saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi “Always preach the Gospel, and use words if you must.”

<sup>619</sup> Ellsberg, *Charles de Foucauld*, 54.



radiated from their silence and hidden life among Muslims. Both men were ‘holy fools’ consumed by an inner fire that was for them the love of Jesus and a passion for the imitation of the Nazarene. Seeking to emulate the hidden life of Jesus and to welcome all humanity, de Foucauld wrote:

I want to accustom all the inhabitants, Christians, Muslims, Jews, and non-believers, to look on me as their brother, their universal brother. Already they are calling this house “the fraternity” (*khaoua*) – about which I am delighted -- and realizing that the poor have a brother here -- not only the poor, though: all men.”<sup>620</sup>

The lives of these two aristocratic men, turned religious, proclaimed the inner core of the Reign of God and their mission gave birth to an authentic religious life.

In de Foucauld as well as de Beaurecueil, who devoted their lives to bearing witness to Jesus before a Muslim community, there were legitimate questions at stake. Along their friendship and care for Muslims, hovered a lingering flavor of paternalism in these Frenchmen’s relations with their Muslim counterparts. It is fair to hold against de Foucauld the fact that he was an objective ally of the colonial regime. He was shaped by his education, his military training and the ethos of French colonialism in northern Africa. The historical background of his generation was the moral and intellectual climate of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe with Gobineau’s *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Race*, Ernest Renan (d. 1892) infamous lecture “Islam and Science” in which he described Islam as intellectually inferior and incompatible with science, and Monseigneur Lavigerie (d. 1892), founder of the Missionaries for Africa, who held similar views.<sup>621</sup> There is no evidence that de Foucauld read Gobineau and Renan, or adhered to their philosophy of races, or borrowed their approach to Islam. Nonetheless, it would be naive to think that he lived in

<sup>620</sup> Quoted by Ellsberg «Charles de Foucauld,» in *Martyrs*, 89.

<sup>621</sup> Mgr. Charles Martial Allemand-Lavigerie «*L’Armée et la mission de la France en Afrique.*» A speech given on April 25, 1875 in Algiers Cathedral, Algiers, A. Journal, 64. Quoted also in Merad, *Christian*, 79. It is important to note that Ernest Renan’s popular and yet controversial book, *La vie de Jésus* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974 [1<sup>st</sup> published in 1863]), enraged many Catholics and other Christians of his time.

French colonial land with the background of a former officer in the French army and was free from colonial biases. For instance, he hoped for the conversion of Muslims to Christianity and believed that adherence to Catholicism meant fidelity to France, “the first daughter” of the Roman Catholic Church, as his homeland was called.

The Christian marabout was aware of the difficulty of his position and wondered, “Will they [the Tuaregs] know how to distinguish between soldiers and priests, to see us as servants of God, envoys of peace, universal brothers.”<sup>622</sup> De Foucauld sought to prepare the Saharan souls for the seed of the Gospel. He notes, “My little work goes on ... preparatory work ... I have not yet come to sowing. I am preparing the ground, other will sow, and others will reap.”<sup>623</sup> Merad remarks that de Foucauld’s hope for Tuaregs’ eventual conversion to catholicism was unreasonable:

But there is a threshold beyond which, it seems to us, he could not reasonably hope to succeed: that is from the moment that the guest and the Christian marabout resolved not only to win the hearts of Tuaregs, but their conscience. For it is one thing to seek the friendship of the Muslim population and summon them ceaselessly to make them better. It was another thing to try to shatter their certainties in order to induce them to get rid of all or part, of their beliefs and give up ancestral faith. Such a renunciation would have meant the ‘unraveling’ of the intimate fibers of their beings.<sup>624</sup>

To the question, what was their inner feeling about Islam and its Prophet? The silence of de Foucauld on the authenticity of Muḥammad’s prophethood points to the difficulty of the issue.<sup>625</sup> Merad questions his deep motives:

There was his charitable work, his inexhaustible kindness, his undeniable desire to do good to the Muslims around him. But beyond his silence about the Qur’ān, the

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<sup>622</sup> Foucauld’s letter to Mgr. Guerin, July 4, 1904. quoted in Casajus, «Charles de Foucauld face au Touaregs, » *Revue d’ethnologie d’Europe*, 5; also, Merad, *Christian*, 82.

<sup>623</sup> Merad, *Christian*, 41

<sup>624</sup> Merad, *Christian*, 41.

<sup>625</sup> Questions about the authenticity of the Prophet of Islam are as old as Islam itself. Concerning Christian scholars’ views, Massignon’s concept of “le prophète négatif” would deeply problematize the debates and sharpen the opposition. His disciple Youakim Moubarak (d. 1995) will defend this minority position and face the objections of many Catholic and close friends of Massignon. See Avon, *Les frères*, 601 - 03.

Prophet and the saints, as well as on the subject of Muslim practices in general, what were the Christian marabout's inner most feelings about Islam?"<sup>626</sup>

One could argue that like many holy and exemplary lives, ambiguity and mixed motives did not shatter his legacy but render it more human. Merad concludes, "Beyond the inevitable blunders and errors of judgment ..., there remains this exceptional human adventure that will continue to summon the Muslim as well as the Christian consciousness."<sup>627</sup> De Foucauld's devotion and compassion to the Tuaregs, his desire for authentic brotherhood and constant effort to see and treat Muslims not as strangers but as neighbors and share their lot did endure until his death. No wonder, Merad asks, "Under the circumstances, would it be too much to think that, although he may belong to Christianity spiritually, the great hermit of the Sahara belongs in some way to Islam, since he chose a Muslim country for his last dwelling place?"<sup>628</sup>

On his part, de Beaurecueil was silent as well about the authenticity of the Prophet of Islam, however, he did not see any spiritual inferiority in Islam. On the contrary, Persian mystics and mystical poems nourish his sacramental, liturgical and spiritual life and imagination. At time he sounds a little presumptuous and confuses his readers in thinking that he had a messiah complex. Correctly, Bédon remarks, «*Personnellement, si j'avais lu ce livre sans te connaître – mais l'aurais-je fait? – sans doute aurais-je haussé les épaules en pensant 'il se prend pour le Bon Dieu lui-même'!*»<sup>629</sup> How could he make Muslims participate spiritually in the mystery of Christian sacraments? He writes:

*Agissant en leur nom bien qu'ils l'ignorassent, je réinterprétais leur vie, leurs aspirations, leurs poèmes mystiques, leurs gestes religieux, leur donnant devant*

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<sup>626</sup> Merad, *Christian*, 43.

<sup>627</sup> Merad, *Christian*, 74.

<sup>628</sup> Merad, *Christian*, 73,

<sup>629</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Prêtre*, 9 - 10.

*Dieu valeur Chrétienne et salvifique. Intercession et 'substitution' se conjuguèrent pour orienter ma vie.*<sup>630</sup>

The Dominican friar was fully aware of the difficulty to pray with his household children. He could not live with the fact that Christian liturgical and sacramental rules excluded his entire family members with whom he shared daily life. He tried several liturgical schemes to include them but the results were artificial, ambiguous and even dangerous. Finally, he recognized the irreducible differences between the two traditions particularly for liturgical prayer. Christians cannot pray the *salāh* and Muslims cannot be communicants at Christian Eucharist. There is a valuable question for interfaith dialogue: could Christians and Muslims pray together or could prayer be a meeting place? For Christian van Nispen tot Sevenaer s.j., prayer is a legitimate meeting point. Praying together might not be possible, but prayer is a fundamental expression of both Christian and Muslim faiths. As long as prayer is not limited to its liturgical expressions it could represent a real openness to the divine and to the other. Sevenaer writes:

*La prière, comme l'ensemble de la vie spirituelle, peut être un vrai lieu de rencontre entre croyants Chrétiens et croyant musulmans. Un lieu de rencontre ne signifie pas une identité entre deux, mais un lieu qui permet aux uns et aux autres de faire un chemin les uns vers les autres en faisant un chemin vers Dieu.*<sup>631</sup>

Likewise, at the late Pope John Paul II's Assisi's World Day of Prayer, the representatives of major faith traditions prayed together in the same location (Assisi), at the same time (October 27, 1986), and for the same intention (world peace). Even though they did not say a common prayer, the gathering of this diverse group was an encounter through prayer. The Pope remarks that "authentic prayer is inspired by the Spirit which dwells mysteriously in

<sup>630</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 42.

<sup>631</sup> Sevenaer, "Prière (*salāt*) et invocation (*du'ā*) entre Islam et Christianisme," Journées Romaines 2005, *biblio.domini.org*; and *Chrétiens*. See also, *Lumen Gentium*.

the heart of each human being.”<sup>632</sup> A few other examples of interreligious prayer are: prayers on the international scenes at the U.N., the World Congress of Faith, the Commonwealth Day Observance held at Westminster Abbey every March, where religious representatives from the Commonwealth countries pray together. These occasions of interreligious prayers are still controversial and raise as much criticism as approval on either side. In *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, Gavin D’Costa devotes an entire chapter to support interreligious prayer. He makes a difference between cultic (liturgical) and non-cultic (non liturgical) prayers and admits the advantages and risks of such enterprise. As a Christian, he observes wisely that “ plunging into the love of the Triune God may well call us to risk finding an even greater love of God through interreligious prayer, and into discovering the darkness and mystery of God afresh.”<sup>633</sup>

Furthermore, de Beaurecueil was influenced by Massignon’s and Mary Kahil’s (d. 1979) notion of *badaliyya* which means to take the place of the other or substitute for another.<sup>634</sup> Kahil defines *badaliyya*:

*Massignon et moi nous avons fait un voeu. Nous nous sommes offerts pour les musulmans. Non pas pour qu’ils se convertissent, mais pour que la volonté de Dieu se fasse sur eux et par eux. Nous voulons faire nôtre leur prière, nôtre leur vie, et les présenter au Seigneur.*<sup>635</sup>

and:

*C’est dans cette vocation pour leur salut que nous devons et voulons nous sanctifier nous-mêmes, aspirant à devenir d’autre Christ (comme des Évangiles vivants), afin qu’ils LE connaissent à travers nous, et que nous sauvagardions, par cet apostolat silencieux et obscur, la sincérité de notre propre donation.*<sup>636</sup>

<sup>632</sup> John Paul II’s speech in Assisi in October 27, 1986.

([http://www.vatican.va/holyfather/johnpaulii/speeches/2002/january/documents.](http://www.vatican.va/holyfather/johnpaulii/speeches/2002/january/documents))

<sup>633</sup> Gavin D’Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 2000), 166.

<sup>634</sup> See R. L. Moreau’s article «La badaliyya» in Massignon, *L’hospitalité sacrée*, 387 – 99.

<sup>635</sup> Pérennès, *Georges Anawati*, 161. Avon, *Les frères*, 124.

<sup>636</sup> Massignon, *L’hospitalité sacrée*, 374.

*La Badaliyya n'est ni une règle d'oraison ni une méthode systematique de pénétration apostolique, c'est une mise à la disposition spirituelle tout offerte au désir que Jésus à des âmes pour répondre à leur place à son appel. C'est un expatriement spirituel pour Lui offrir l'hospitalité dans ces autres âmes en toute humilité, pudeur et foi.*<sup>637</sup>

Indeed, in 1934, Kahil and Massignon made a vow before the altar of a Franciscan church in Damietta (Egypt) to the God of Abraham, father of the Jews, Christians and Muslims. They dedicated their lives to pray to God with and for their Muslims neighbors. Until the end of his life Massignon wrote an annual letter to the members of the *badaliyya* that expressed the intensity of his spirituality and deep mystery of mystical substitution. In addition, *badaliyya* embraces Massignon's own understanding that by learning the language and experiencing the tradition and culture of the religious other our own religious life is enhanced. The idea of intercession for the religious other, not for conversion but for the will of God to be realized with them and through them marked deeply de Beaurecueil spirituality. He saw himself, like Massignon and Kahil, offering for God prayers (*du 'ā'*) on behalf of the Afghans. The following prayer entitled *Prière d'un prêtre à Kaboul*, makes our point:

*C'est ainsi que la nuit, lorsque mon peuple dort, pieds nus, accroupis dans le fond de ma petite chapelle, je me fais son intercesseur. Comme Abraham, come Jacob, comme Moïse, comme Jésus ... Un bâtonnet de santal répand son parfum, symbole de tous ceux qui sont consumés aujourd'hui, dans le dur labeur, dans la souffrance, ou dans l'amour ... Et je suis là, accablé de toutes les fautes de mon peuple, affligé de toute ses peines, lourd de tous ces espoirs. Tous ceux qui se sont endormis aujourd'hui, pensant ne rencontrer qu'un juge, je les présente à leur Sauveur et les introduis aux Noces Eternelles. Tous les petits qui sont nés aujourd'hui, j'en fais des enfants de Dieu. Toutes les prières accomplies aujourd'hui, dans les maisons, dans les mosquées, je les transforme en «Notre Père» ... Mon coeur n'est plus que le creuset où, au feu de l'amour du Christ, tous les alliages de chez nous se métamorphosent en or. Et à travers mes lèvres que je lui prête, c'est l'Afghanistan tout entier qui clame vers le Père cet «Abba!» que lui souffle l'Esprit.*<sup>638</sup>

<sup>637</sup> Massignon, *L'hospitalité sacrée*, 382. The entire third part of the book focuses on *badaliyya*, 387 – 99. Also see R. L. Moreau, o.p., «La badaliyya, » 387 – 99 in Massignon, *L'hospitalité sacrée*.

<sup>638</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 67. See Table 4, de Beaurecueil at prayer in his chapel.

In Christian theologies, intercession on behalf of another person seems widely accepted. On the contrary, in Islam the idea of intercession does raise heated theological debates which are beyond the scope of our immediate purpose. *Badaliyya* is certainly open to serious criticism, particularly, on the Muslim side. Who are those Christians who believe they could intercede for their fellow Muslims? De Beaurecueil's *Prière d'un prêtre à Kaboul* is laden with Christian theologies and will sound very problematic to most Muslim ears. Does *badaliyya* fail to take seriously both faith traditions' irreducible difference? At any rate, praying for or with the religious other could be a sign of care, hospitality and recognition of a shared and deeply ingrained truth: together we stand before God and in the name of God. Even though intercession or praying together remains a delicate and unsettling issue for interfaith dialogue, it seems that *badaliyya* could foster a respectful attention to the religious experience of the other. Maybe it is in these irreducible differences of faith traditions that religious dialogue is most appreciated.

To return to Christians' view of Muslims, at least for de Beaurecueil and de Foucauld, one could argue that they did not think that their hosts (Muslim peoples of the Sahara and Afghanistan) were to be freed from their 'spiritual dereliction' and delivered to western religious culture. But, could these Christian lives implanted in the heart of Islamic lands be allowed an *epoché* or to bracket the irreconcilable doctrinal and theological questions? It seemed that as guests they recognized that there were boundaries to their actions and they must observe a certain restraint and deference. Also, unless they wanted to be presumptuous, they needed to acknowledge the limitations of an outsider who by definition lacks the inner knowledge to appreciate the genuineness of the religious faith of the other. The practice of great reserve on doctrinal and theological matters meant that "perfect imitation of Jesus by a Christian must assume a great moral and spiritual

significance in the eyes of Muslims.”<sup>639</sup> For de Beaurecueil, God’s providence for humanity is unfathomable and surely includes the Afghan. In his article «*Pas de frontières au Royaume de Dieu*,» he came back to the distinction, on the one hand, between a Christian and a disciple of Jesus, and on the other, between the reign of God and the historical Catholic Church.<sup>640</sup> His role was to be the best Christian guest to his Muslims hosts by faithfully imitating Jesus. Hence, the prophetic and hidden life of Jesus of Nazareth grounded also de Beaurecueil’s theology of priesthood. The ortho-praxis of his religious life and priesthood was the dialogue of life of a Christian in Afghanistan.

## ***II Un Chrétien en Afghanistan***

This section follows the Dominican friar’s meditation on specific features of his religious identity among Muslims.

### ***1: Prêtre des non-Chrétiens***

Our investigation pays attention not to the classical role of a priest in a Christian community but to how the Muslim community and other friends in Kabul have shaped de Beaurecueil’s theology and praxis of priesthood. Christian theology of priesthood borrows from the cultic priesthood of the Hebrew people and the New Testament theology.<sup>641</sup> If the classical theology of priesthood in Christian tradition seems of little value to de Beaurecueil in Kabul, could one argue that the Qur’ānic treatment of ‘the People of the Book’ and particularly its portraits of monasticism (*rahbāniyya*),<sup>642</sup> and monk (*rāhib*), religious, or

<sup>639</sup> Merad, *Christian*, 83.

<sup>640</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 57 - 69. On the distinction between the reign of God and the church and the relationship between the historical Jesus and the universal Christ of faith see Geffré, *De Babel*, 68 - 70; Dupuis, *Towards*, 330 - 58; and *Jesus Christ and the Encounter of World Religions*, trans. Robert A. Barr, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991 ), 178 - 207.

<sup>641</sup> See David Power, “Priesthood in Christian Tradition.”

<sup>642</sup> Paul Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique: nouvel essai sur le lexique technique des mystiques musulmans*. (Beyreuth: Dar-el-Machreq, 1970), 52 - 56.



priest had some influence on him? Among the primary sources for Muslims' understanding of Christianity, and particularly monasticism, a few Qur'ānic verses seem pertinent;<sup>643</sup> and it is there that our investigation looks for Muslims' expectations of Christians.<sup>644</sup> To be certain, the Islamic view of monasticism is diverse, complex and the Qur'ān itself is ambivalent and ambiguous about Christian monks and priests. Four Qur'ānic verses refer directly to monks or monasticism: verse 82 of *sūrat al-Mā'idah*, 31 and 34 of *sūrat al-Tawba*, 27 of *sūrat al-Ḥadīd*.<sup>645</sup> Generally, Q. 5: 82 and 83 seem to praise and hold Christian monks as good models and commend their practice of mortification. However, the Qur'ānic verse 27 of *sūrat al-Ḥadīd* remarks that monasticism was a Christian

<sup>643</sup> The Sunna and particularly ḥadīth literature as an authoritative source will not be part of our discussion in the section.

<sup>644</sup> Jane McAuliffe, Jeane. *Qur'ānic Christian: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1 - 9. Her entire book focuses on the Qur'ānic treatment of Christians in tafsīr literature. McAuliffe deals mainly with such Christians themes as "Nazarenes of faith and actions" and the "followers of the Qur'ānic Jesus." She shows that "the praiseworthy amity of Christians" should not be invoked indiscriminately. The Qur'ānic commentators through the ages have understood them to refer to a limited number of Christians. See McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic*, 204 - 239; Ayoub, *A Muslim*, 73 - 78 and 187 - 208. Also see his article "Muslim Views of Christianity: Some Modern Examples," *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984) 49 - 70. Other works on Muslim views of Christianity: Hugh Goddard, *Muslims Perceptions of Christianity* (London: Gery Seal Book, 1996); Simon Wood, "The Criticisms of Christians and the arguments of Islam: An annotated translation of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā's *Shubahāt al-Naṣārā wā Hujaj al-Islam*," PhD thesis, Temple University, May 2004. The dissertation is published as *Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proof: Rashīd Riḍā's Modernist Defense of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008); Finally Umar Ryad, *Islamic Reformist and Christianity: A Critical reading of the Works of Rashīd Riḍā and his Associates*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009). The book is a thorough study of Rashīd Riḍā's polemic writings and his associates in his famous journal *al-Manār*. The author focuses of the dynamic of Muslim understanding of Christianity during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>645</sup> From M. Williams Pickthal's *Glorious Qur'ān*:

Thou wilt find the most vehement of mankind in hostility to those who believe (to be) the Jews and the idolaters. And thou wilt find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe (to be) those who say: Lo! We are Christians. That is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not proud. (*al-Mā'idah*, v. 82)

They have taken as lords beside Allah their rabbis and their monks and the Messiah son of Mary, when they were bidden to worship only One God. There is no god save Him. Be He glorified from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him)! (*al-Tawba*, v. 31)

O ye who believe! Lo! many of the (Jewish) rabbis and the (Christian) monks devour the wealth of mankind wantonly and debar (men) from the way of Allah. They who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah, unto them give tidings (O Muḥammad) of a painful doom. (*al-Tawba*, v. 34)

Then We caused Our messengers to follow in their footsteps; and We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow, and gave him the Gospel, and placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him. But monasticism they invented - We ordained it not for them - only seeking Allah's pleasure, and they observed it not with right observance. So We give those of them who believe their reward, but many of them are evil-livers. (*al-Ḥadīd*, v. 27)

invention and Christian monks failed to live up to its demands. The verse recognizes, nonetheless, that the motive of monastic life is to please God. Also, a number of positive characters are ascribed to Christians such as “kindness and mercy.” Likewise, *sūrat al-Mā'idah* verses 82 - 85 points to Christian monks' humility, meekness and describes them as the “nearest in friendship.”<sup>646</sup> Finally, in the early days of Islam, Abū Bakr al Ṣiddīq's instruction to Yazīd ibn Abū Sufyān before the conquest of Syria seems to suggest that Christians monks were protected.<sup>647</sup> Likewise, Ayoub asserts that this tolerant attitude of Q. 5:85 is pertinent even in times of conflict and hostility and could serve as a reminder for Muslims to show restraint against a common human tendency to cruel revenge against the enemy. He traces the application of these principles back to time of the Prophet and concludes that they became Sunna, an example bidding on all later generations.<sup>648</sup> He refers to a ḥādīth related on the authority of Abū Bakr:

Do not betray [one another in war]. Do not commit treachery. Do not mutilate or kill a young child, an old man or woman. Do not cut down trees bearing fruits. Do not slaughter a sheep, a cow or a camel except if you need it for food. *You shall pass by people who have dedicated themselves to acts of devotion in their hermitages. Let them be, and that to which they have dedicated themselves.*<sup>649</sup>

<sup>646</sup> Abdelmajid Charfi, “Christianity in the Qur'ān commentary of Tabarī,” *Islamochristiana* 6 (1980): 105 - 148; Maurice Borrmans, «Le commentaire du Manār à propos du verset coranique sur l'amitié des musulmans pour les Chrétiens, » *Islamochristiana* 1 (1975): 71 – 86; Jacques Jomier, *Le commentaire coranique du manār* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1954), especially, the chapter «Le commentaire coranique du manār en face du Jadaïsme et du Christianisme, le devoir de Prosélitisme.» 301 – 37.

<sup>647</sup> See Abū Bakr al Ṣiddīq's instruction to Yazīd ibn Abū Sufyān before the conquest Syria in Nasreddin Lebatelier, *Ibn Taymiyya: Le statut des moines*. (Beyrouth: El-Safīna 1997) 13. (Nasreddin Lebatelier is Y. Michot's nom de plume in this pamphlet).

<sup>648</sup> Ayoub, “Roots of Muslim-Christian Conflict,” *MW* 79 no 1 (Jan.1989) 31.

<sup>649</sup> Quoted in Ayoub, “Roots of Muslim-Christian Conflict,” 31. (the italics in the ḥādīth are mine.). Tor Andrea makes a similar argument and points to the influence of Christian monasticism on early Ṣūfism. He refers to the testimony of a leader of the Nestorian Church in the year 650. “These Arabs do not only avoid fighting Christianity, they even endorse our religion, they honour our priests and holy men and donate gifts to monasteries and churches.” *In the Garden of Myrtles*, trans. Birgitta Sharpe, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), 8. In his book, *Muḥammad and the Believers*, Fred Donner cites the same Nestorian patriarch Isho'yahb III in Iraq writing in 647/648 about the new rulers amity with Christian monks (p. 114). He argues that the early believer's movement was ecumenical (if we accept the anachronism) and pious Jews and Christians were included among the “Qur'ānic monotheists.” (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), “Ecumenism” 68 – 74. To be clear, the relation between Muslims and Christian monks has not always been good and too many tragic episodes mark history.

Nonetheless, there are dissenting voices which remark that, first, even Q. 5: 82 is not particularly favorable to monasticism, contrary to the interpretation accepted by many Christian-Muslims dialogue circles. Second, the verses in *sūrat al-Tawba* are anti-clerical and very critical of Christian monks, and third, the verse of *sūrat al-Ḥadīd* justifies the condemnation of Christian monasticism. These critics see a fundamental rejection of priesthood in Islamic tradition.<sup>650</sup> In the case of de Beaurecueil, however, these fears and critical approaches to Christian monasticism did not play out in hostility and the Afghans seem to have accepted his religious status read Q. 2:62 and 5:62 favorably to Christians in this case.

Another reason for sympathy was that de Beaurecueil's Christian idea of religious life, holiness and imitation of Christ did not fit *sūrat al-Tawbah*'s depiction of Christians in verses 31 and 34. On the contrary, his life was in stark contrast to abuses of power and wealth in some Christian religious circles and to the cult of shaykhs and saints in certain circles in Afghanistan. It was (and is) a common practice in part of the Muslim world where the shaykh had almost unlimited authority over his followers. This "refined form of tyranny" exercised by the shaykhs toward their disciples and their "glorious parasites"<sup>651</sup> lucrative livelihood, particularly those who claim to descent from the prophet, were contrary to de Beaurecueil's care for Kabul street children. Unlike some religious leaders, priors and abbots, or marabout and shaykhs, who lorded over their own community, the

Dominican friar assumed the hidden life of the poor and strove to live humbly. He came to

<sup>650</sup> Lebatelier, *Le statut*, 9 - 13. The author scrutinizes the classical Islamic history to show the complexity and diversity of opinions on Islamic view of Christian monasticism. He refers to Ibn Taymiyya's fatwā on monasticism and speaks of the fundamental anti-clericalism of Islam and his Prophet and concludes that: «*La véritable rahbāniyya, c'est en somme l'Islam, la soumission de soi au Très-Haut, dans la paix et la sérénité de l'âme et du corps que seul procure la mise en correspondance de sa volonté avec celle de Dieu, telle que révélée dans le Coran et idéalement illustrée par Muḥammad, c'est-à-dire l'effort constant, la lutte sur Son chemin, al-jihād fī sabīl Allāh.*» Lebatelier, *Le statut*, 12.

<sup>651</sup> Zoe Hersov used "refined form of tyranny" and "glorious parasites" to described Shaykhs who exploit their disciples and lord over them in her "Translator's Afterword" in Merad, *Christian*, 85.

identify Kabul with Nazareth or Jerusalem. At least, one could say that de Beaurecueil's apostolate was Christian and mystical at its core but also congruent with some Qur'ānic mandates, "... the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you," and, "Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of God, is the best in conduct. (Q. 49:13); and "... So vie one with another in good works" (Q. 5: 48). He did not see himself adhering to these Qur'ānic mandates but squarely faithful to his religious life. Namely, the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and the life story of Saint Dominic. To be certain, a mysterious impulse led the Dominican friar to the House of Islam and opened his heart to the poor. In Kabul, he tried to humanize a land so wild that it seemed to be torn from a lunar world.

There is no doubt that the examples of Afghan Muslims play an important role in de Beaurecueil's spiritual growth and transformed his views of mission. In Christianity as well as in Islam, individual and community of faith are servants and worshipers of God, and in Kabul, servanthood and worship were two faces of the same reality for him. The obvious influence is the work and life of his master Anṣārī. From the Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī, he understood God's absolute sovereignty and majesty (*jalāl*) and from Rūmī he took away God's love and beauty (*jamāl*).<sup>652</sup> These two mystical intuitions present in Christian tradition as well nourished a sense of awe and freedom in him. Likewise, the simplicity, dignity, humility and poverty of most Afghans touched him deeply and forced him to be more authentic in his religious life and priesthood. Afghanistan's austere climate and the exquisite beauty of its landscape shaped its people and children and de Beaurecueil experienced the beauty and the misery first hand. He could not stand idle before children's pain and death. Innocent children's suffering due mainly to their families dire socio-economic situation prompted in

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<sup>652</sup> A part from Anṣārī, de Beaurecueil had a great admiration for Rūmī and for a little while he hesitated between the Pīr of Herāt and Rūmī. See his biography [www.iedo.org](http://www.iedo.org).

him a divine revolt against an inhuman condition because as St Irenaeus puts it, “the human being fully alive is the glory of God.”

Furthermore, the whole notion of self-renunciation had a powerful appeal to Muslims. In our case, the Afghans were impressed by the sacrifice of a religious man who gave up wealth and comfort (de Beaurecueil comes from aristocratic stock) and the security of conventual life to share the lot of the poor in the desert and mountains of Afghanistan.<sup>653</sup> From the Muslims’ point of view, the Dominican friar’s imitation of Jesus corresponds to the Islamic expectation of the People of the Book and was “the most eloquent way to espouse the authenticity of the Gospel message.”<sup>654</sup> For example, Dr. Abdul Hamid Rahimi’s friendship with de Beaurecueil was extraordinary. Both men shared a close spiritual affinity and a strong bond of brotherhood. Dr. Rahimi was a devout Muslim who worked at Kabul’s general hospital. He was one of the physicians who provided medical attention and care to most of the children in the *Maison d’Abraham*. De Beaurecueil recalled with great respect and admiration Rahimi’s crucial distinction between a Christian and a disciple of Jesus. He write :

*Nous parlions d’un ami commun, le docteur Rahimi, qui demeure pour moi un lumineux exemple de vie évangélique. ‘Chrétien qui s’ignore; ai-je eu le malheur de dire. Non! pas Chrétien! Musulman, mais disciple de Jésus. Ce n’est pas la même chose. ...*<sup>655</sup>

And he adds,

*«la distinction ... entre Chrétien (baptisé, confessant la religion de Jésus) et disciple de Jésus (vivant de l’esprit de l’Évangile)... On peut être Chrétien sans être ‘disciple du Christ’; on peut être disciple du Christ sans être Chrétien.»*<sup>656</sup>

<sup>653</sup> See Rahimi’s documentary movie, *Nous avons*.

<sup>654</sup> Merad, *Christian*, 85.

<sup>655</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 58.

<sup>656</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 33.

Similarly, de Beaurecueil's other closest friends who influenced him were French expatriates<sup>657</sup> (*coopérants*) most of them atheists and for whom he had a keen interest.

Bédon, who was affectionally called '*le mécréant de Kabul*' by de Beaurecueil, paints this portrait of his Dominican friend:

*Ce qui est sûr, c'est que tu mets en pratique, en donnant tout de toi, les principes du charpentier de Nazareth dont tu te réclames. Ce qui est sûr, c'est que tu crois à ton rôle de pasteur et à ton rôle de prophète, sans prétention aucune, mais avec une simplicité et une douceur obstinées et pas toujours de mise dans un monde dur.*<sup>658</sup>

Another close friend, Etienne Gill, who lived with him for years and edited his wartime letters, speaks of the friar's deliberate attempt to live in harmony with Afghan culture, and religious sensibilities as a token of hospitality to his household members and Kabul's friends. In addition, he cultivated sincere friendship with *Les petites soeurs de Jésus de Charles de Foucauld*, father Angelo Panigati, a priest attached to the Italian Embassy, and many foreigners in various capacities. These latter relationships with his French compatriots were places of refuge, solidarity and gave him some sense of familiarity. Even among his country men and women, he was drawn to atheists and the agnostics, the others and the estranged to his Catholic circles. Gill remarks:

*En Afghanistan, et même s'il était fier que sa maison fonctionnât quasi à l'afghane, il développa beaucoup de relations fraternelles non seulement avec des Afghans, mais aussi, j'ai envie de dire surtout avec des coopérants étrangers, principalement français. Ce n'est pas pour rien qu'il demanda à un ami français incroyant d'écrire une préface pour Nous avons partagé le pain et le sel. Il avait une telle prédilection pour les gens éloignés de l'Église, qu'il déçut parfois de bons Chrétiens qui auraient voulu, sinon l'accaparer, du moins qu'il s'occupe davantage d'eux. Parmi les gens qu'il citait souvent, il y avait Lebeau, les Renou, Simone Lajoine, les Delloye et tant d'autres. Ceux-ci le recevaient comme un frère, le tutoyaient et dans des moments de cafard, pas si rares que cela, il se rendait chez eux pour se changer les idées.*<sup>659</sup>

<sup>657</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 110 - 11. Etienne Gill and Simone Bailleau -Lajoine were the most memorable friends of his Kabul adventure.

<sup>658</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Prêtre*, 12.

<sup>659</sup> Gill, «Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009,» 4.

De Beaurecueil's Kabul years were a perpetual learning curve, a constant re-imagination of his religious life in uncharted territory. It is no wonder that his religious experience was completely other and almost impossible to duplicate. Our contention is that such a religious life betrays a scandalous inner freedom proper to prophets and mystics.

At any rate, de Beaurecueil's theological meditations about priesthood are the fruit of a Christian religious life shaped by Muslims. His whole theology of priesthood and religious life are squarely biblical and focused exclusively on the prophetic life and priesthood of Jesus of Nazareth. His theology is an attempt to retrieve the original intuition of the life and ministry of Jesus before "Constantinian Christianity" or what the South African Dominican friar, Albert Nolan, terms, *Jesus before Christianity*.<sup>660</sup> De Beaurecueil's meditations are a kind of '*ressourcement*' or going back to the roots in order to understand the divine intuition at work in the portraits of Jesus given by the Christian scriptures. In his book, *Un Chrétien en Afghanistan*, he sets a parallel between Jesus in Jerusalem with de Beaurecueil in Kabul as the celebrant, the prophet, the servant, and the pastor. Hence, our analysis will be Christian in its orientation and Catholic in substance.

De Beaurecueil remained a Dominican friar to the core even though he took much liberty in contextualizing his religious life. In such a case, it is almost impossible to expect an immaculate consistency between spiritual experience and theological discourse. But, there is not a total discontinuity between words and experience. His letters, articles and books are treasures of spiritual meditations and their titles are in themselves '*tout un programme*.'"<sup>661</sup> The spiritual journey of this Dominican friar in Kabul expresses one way of being a Christian, a religious and a priest in the Muslim world. As he puts it, «*disciple et*

<sup>660</sup> See Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001 [re-edition]).

<sup>661</sup> The titles he chose for his articles are very telling, for example: «Des lacets verts!» or «Émerveillement et rigolade» or «Entrons dans la danse» or «Tais toi! Et que respandisse sa Lumière.» All these articles are collected in his posthumous book, *Je crois*.

*prêtre de Jésus dans mes montagnes, au milieu de mon peuple qui vous ignore, je suis contraint, j'ai pour mission, de perpétuer la vie de Nazareth.»*<sup>662</sup> also, «... *Perdu au milieu d'eux, épousant leur destin, j'orienterai leurs pas vers le Soleil.»*<sup>663</sup> Let us turn to other major aspects of his religious identity.

## 2 Pastor, Servant, Celebrant

De Beaurecueil's meditations on what he calls, *Prêtre des non Chrétiens*, explores the life of Jesus of Nazareth's public ministry. His choice to parallel his life in Kabul in 1967 to that of Jesus of Nazareth in Jerusalem in the year 30, as noted earlier in this chapter, might seem pretentious on his part. However, a close examination of his meditations reveals his constant search to emulate the prophetic life form of the historical Jesus. He remarks,

*Que je sois prêtre, voilà qui ne gêne personne: c'est un état bien défini et, somme toute, inoffensif ... Que, travail achevé, au lieu de retrouver amis, femme et enfants, je me retire pour prier, c'est chose qui me regarde, et moi seul ... L'Islam à ses derviches et ses mollàs, que l'on méprise, ou que l'on craint, selon les cas. Et comme on sait que par mes rites, il ne s'agit d'ensorceler personne, c'est plutôt avec sympathie que, rassuré de voir qu'un étranger peut croire en Dieu au point de lui donner sa vie, on laisse faire ... Si le fait de mon sacerdoce devait étonner quelqu'un, ce serait plutôt les Chrétiens dont mon comportement brouille les habitudes, et qui se demandent parfois ce que je suis venu bien faire dans cette galère ...*<sup>664</sup>

According to Gill,<sup>665</sup> who taught at Lycée Isteqlāl in Kabul where de Beaurecueil was a counselor, the Dominican friar turned out to be a pedagogue, a theologian, and a creative liturgist. Gill was a first hand witness to how the Dominican friar managed to keep a daily horarium and celebration of Eucharist in the most unusual circumstances. Gill

<sup>662</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 89.

<sup>663</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 87.

<sup>664</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 98.

<sup>665</sup> Etienne Gill lived with de Beaurecueil in the same apartment complex from 1969 to 1972, then two years across the street from his house and for four more years in the same vicinity. Very few people could speak about de Beaurecueil's daily life with authority and sincerity as Gill does.



recalled that de Beaurecueil's constant aim was to create a liturgical and sacramental life which inculturated his Afghan milieu. His daily horarium and Eucharist took place in a little room set up as the chapel in his house. Gill attempts to describe the physical location of his chapel and the impossible task to live a regular Dominican life. He files this description of daily liturgy:

*Quand j'arrivai chez lui, en 1969, il célébrait la messe tous les jours dans une petite chapelle qu'il avait aménagée dans la golkhana (pièce vitrée pour faire pousser des fleurs) dans sa maison. Il célébrait assis en tailleur devant un autel en bois sculpté, coiffé d'une calotte brodée, vêtu d'une aube et pieds nus... Les prières de la messe étaient dites en Persan. La messe commençait par un poème de de Djalaloddin Roumi. ... La lecture des épîtres était faite en français en continu d'un jour à l'autre. Quant à l'Évangile il était lu en dari. Pendant l'offertoire, Serge venait s'agenouiller devant chacun, avec une aiguière pour lui laver les mains, à la mode afghan assisté de Mirdad, tandis qu'était récitées les béatitudes en persan. ...*

*Comme prière eucharistique il affectionnait la Didaché. Si la liturgie se permettait quelques libertés, elle restait assez orthodoxe. ... Petit à petit, Serge avait enrichi les textes par des poèmes de mystiques persans. ... Il avait traduit l'Agnus Dei à sa manière. Considérant que l'agneau de Dieu ne pouvait rien évoquer dans la culture afghane, il avait remplacé l'expression par 'lion de Dieu' qu'il reliait à la tradition judéo-Chrétienne par l'évocation du Lion de Juda.<sup>666</sup>*

This narrative elicits two remarks: first the Dominican friar believed that the Gospels and Christian religious life could find an abode in other cultures as they could inhabit in the Greco-Roman one. De Beaurecueil attempted to remove his religious experience and theological imagination from the ambit of the Western Latin Catholicism in order to be incarnated in the religious worldview of the people around him. Even though in his case, he was most of the time the only Christian at his liturgical celebration.<sup>667</sup> He would realize that the celebration of Eucharist among Muslim children was laden with serious danger. Christian liturgical experience was just too foreign for his household members, and

<sup>666</sup> Gill, «Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009» 1.

<sup>667</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 77 - 80.

no wonder the experience could not last. For him, the Eucharist embraces all human dimensions and unites the sacred to the mundane. In reference to his Muslim audience, he remarks,

*Heureusement que je suis là pour que ces pauvres gens me sauvent, eux qui souffrent, qui prient, qui aiment sans doute beaucoup mieux que je ne saurais le faire! Et heureusement qu'il y a de temps en temps l'Eucharistie, pour m'aider à mieux partager, à vivre davantage dans l'Esprit de Jésus!*<sup>668</sup>

Second, he believed his entire religious life had to be founded not just on a theology congruent with his Afghan environment and thought-forms, but on a properly Afghan style. Hence, he celebrated the liturgy of the hours and Eucharist not in the white Dominican habit but in local attire. He translated “the lamb of God” in the *Angus Dei* to “the lion of God.” He chose the Eucharistic prayer from the Didache, used the Byzantine rite, and included Persian poetry of Rūmī and Anṣārī. In Kabul, his theological imagination was stretched to its utmost capacity and his liturgical experience was itself in a situation of utter otherness where nothing was familiar. In such a case, he surrendered to the promptings of Spirit. De Beaurecueil’s liturgical imagination in Kabul was reminiscent of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s<sup>669</sup> *Hymn of the Universe* written when in the course of a scientific expedition, he found himself in the Ordos Desert (in China) where it was impossible to celebrate Eucharist. One can argue that de Chardin’s “The Mass on the World” spoke of the amazing

<sup>668</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 78.

<sup>669</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. was professor of geology at the Catholic Institute in Paris, director of the National Geologic Survey of China, and director of the National Research Center of France. He died in New York City in 1955. Many consider de Chardin to be a pioneering figure in modern catholic theology and one of the most brilliant theologians who tried to bridge the divide between science and religion. The Jesuit priest, however, was criticized by the Roman Curia and his own order for his avant-garde thought. As a result, he was ordered by the Jesuit General Vladimir Ledochowski to leave his teaching position in France in 1925, and some of his works were denied publication during his lifetime. In 1950, Pope Pius XII’s encyclical *Humani generis* condemned many of Teilhard’s positions, and in 1962, a decree from the Roman Curia denounced his works. Among his most popular books are: *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008); *The Divine Milieu*; (New York: Paulist Press, 2007); *The Future of Man*, trans. Norman Denny, (New York: Image Books, 2004); and *Hymn on the Universe* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1972); De Beaurecueil explicitly refers to Teilhard’s Mass on the universe and Ernest Wiechert’s *Missa sine nomine* as “*Eucharistie transfigurante*.” in *Je crois*, 79.

lucidity of his scientific vision and mystical wisdom. He as well as de Beaurecueil experienced what most well institutionalized religious life often undermines –the constant abiding presence of God who surpasses all imagination and renders naught our petty attachment to liturgical elements. In de Chardin's case it was bread and wine, and in de Beaurecueil's the routine of conventual life. Here, the friar, the priest and the celebrant were united in *le partage du pain et du sel*.

### **3 Nous avons partagé le pain et sel**

*Depuis que le Seigneur a partagé le pain avec ses apôtres en en faisant une communion à son Corps, tout partage du pain m'apparaît comme le signe, l'appel, la préparation ou le prolongement de l'Eucharistie. Toute infidélité au lien que crée le partage du pain à quelque chose de sacrilège. Lorsque j'ai, pour la première fois, partagé le pain et le sel avec Ghaffār, c'était dans une pièce contiguë à la petite chapelle où, le soir même, je venais de consacrer l'Eucharistie. Célébrant au rite oriental, c'est ce même pain, partagé entre nous pour sceller l'amitié, dont une part est devenue le Corps du Christ.*<sup>670</sup>

Often, the dreadfulness of daily life is the ideal place where the most sacred religious experience occurs. Jesus' parables were ordinary stories pointing to the extraordinary presence of God. Similarly, the ordinary and almost mundane visit of Abdūl-Ghaffār Paktiyānī at the *Maison d'Abraham* was a fateful day which changed de Beaurecueil's life. Ghaffār said «*Je suis venu vous demander quelque chose: accepteriez-vous que nous mangions ensemble, une fois chez vous, puis une fois chez moi? Je voudrais que nous partagions le pain et le sel, après quoi nous serions liés pour toujours.*»<sup>671</sup> Hence, de Beaurecueil and Ghaffār were host and guest in each other household for a very brief time. Tragically, Ghaffār died several weeks later in a car accident. The sharing of bread and salt with Ghaffār was the ultimate sign, a turning point in de Beaurecueil's love affair with

<sup>670</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 21.

<sup>671</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 14; and *Mes enfants*, 63.

Afghanistan. At this point it is fair to say that scholarly research on Anṣārī takes a back seat and a new era comes forth. It is not far fetch to compare Ghaffār's invitation to Jesus's conversation with the Syrophoenician women (Mk. 7:25-30 and Mt. 15:21-28) or Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's encounter with Shams Tabrīzī. Ghaffār's invitation and sudden death were an epiphany for de Beaurecueil. He remarks:

*Cet accident me bouleversa. Je méditai sur 'le pain et le sel' qu'à sa demande nous avons partagés ensemble, donnant au geste une valeur quasi 'sacramentelle' aux conséquences incalculables. Et c'est au cours de cette réflexion que tout s'éclaira. Le sens de ma vie à Kaboul? Ghaffār, sans s'en douter, m'avait donné la clef pour le comprendre. J'étais ici pour partager la vie des Afghans, dans la banalité de ses événements quotidiens, ne serait-ce que de manger ensemble ... un tel partage liait ma destinée à la leur, scellait le droit d'intercession – si cher à Massignon – me consacrait trait d'union entre le Christ et eux, instrument silencieux de la Grâce.<sup>672</sup>*

This ephemeral gesture was a profound religious experience and spoke volumes to the Dominican friar. The experience provided meaning and significance for his *sacerdoce* in an exclusively Muslim environment. In Afghanistan he rediscovered the meaning of prayer, and sacramental life, and the importance of pilgrimage when he visited Anṣārī's and Ghaffār's graveyards. De Beaurecueil could really say with honesty and gratitude:

*Ma patrie spirituelle, ma Terre Promise, c'est l'Afghanistan. Mes pères (Anṣārī), mes frères (Rawān, Pāyanda et tant d'autres), mes enfants (un Ghaffār), ce sont les Afghans, aimés tels qu'ils sont, avec leur grandeur et leurs misères, leurs joies et leurs peines, leurs espérances; ce sont ceux avec qui, conscient de la signification sacrée du geste, je partage chaque jour le pain et le sel.<sup>673</sup>*

The sacramental dimension of this gesture strikes a chord in the Dominican friar's self-consciousness. He links it to Jesus' hidden life in Nazareth, «*Le mystère du pain et du sel, c'est celui de la 'vie cachée', vécue à la lumière de la transfiguration.*» To break bread with the religious other is to share life, and out of this gesture, hospitality is offered and received, prayer is uttered and a possibility of companionship is found. This gesture is a

<sup>672</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 64 - 65.

<sup>673</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 16.

source of nourishment for spiritual and human friendship. First, de Beaurecueil shares bread and salt with Ghaffār and after his death, anytime he does it with other Afghans, he realizes that this broken and shared bread, this simple and daily gesture symbolizes the agape, the communion of lives, and the presence of the divine in their midst. No wonder, de Beaurecueil remarks, *«pour moi en Afghanistan, la théologie se confond avec la vie, avec la prière, avec l'amour, avec la découverte des liens spirituels que crée le partage du pain et du sel.»*<sup>674</sup> and he concludes,

*Fidèle à son appel, chaque jour je refais le geste prophétique: au repas, je partage le pain avec les siens, dont j'épouse un peu plus ainsi la destinée ..., chaque soir en leur nom, je consomme le Pain, anticipant, préfigurant, et faisant advenir le temps où, illuminés par l'Esprit, emplis de foi et consumés d'amour, répondant à leur vocation éternelle, ils accéderont aux mystères d'Autel ...*<sup>675</sup>

For de Beaurecueil to share bread and salt with Afghans has ushered in a community and fosters a common destiny. Sharing salt and bread has opened his eyes to a new meaning of 'Church,' the local community which is part of the larger human community deeply loved and graced by God. A community referred to in the bible as "people of God, royal priesthood, holy nation, splendid bride of the lamb." (1Pe 2:9-10 , and *Lumen Gentium*, #4). He sees in this community the promise of the reign of God, already present and not yet accomplished. He remarks, *«Ainsi je reconnus la présence de l'Église par instinct de connaturalité, pour avoir partagé avec ses enfants le pain et le sel. ... Je vis donc, lourd de ce secret, que Dieu seul partage avec moi.»* However, what about the religious other for whom the Catholic sense of sacramentality is completely foreign? The Dominican friar recognizes that the reality is not only beyond the religious other but most of all beyond himself. He remarks,

<sup>674</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 14.

<sup>675</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 103 - 104.

*Il l'ignorait je le savais. ... Mais la réalité était là, indépendante de la connaissance plus ou moins claire qu'en avait l'un ou l'autre de nous d'eux. D'ailleurs, précisément parce que le partage du pain avait délibérément pour but d'assurer entre nous une communauté de vie, une unité d'être, en moi et par moi il avait part au mystère, dont il avait accompli le geste préfiguratif.*<sup>676</sup>

In Catholic Christian theology, the Eucharist is the ultimate place where God's self-communication to humanity and human response meet in the most intimate way. It is not a moment of theological and philosophical discourse but a mystical encounter. For de Beaurecueil, sharing bread and salt contextualized his priestly and religious life, but above all, his daily life with his 'children' at the *Maison d'Abraham* provided a unique Eucharistic milieu where he was the only Christian. De Beaurecueil recalls with some nostalgia his earlier years in Kabul, and particularly, the routine of a regular religious life with the liturgy of the Hours (three times a day), the celebration of Eucharist in the evening and Complines (night prayer) before bed time. Eucharist was *le point d'orgue* of a day of labor, the sacralization of daily bread and the symbol of life shared with others. He remarks, «*se présenter à l'autel pour y présenter à Dieu les événements, les gens et les choses; les 'consacrer' avec le Pain, communier aux mystères au nom de tous, afin de retourner vers eux le lendemain, dans la vie 'profane', rayonnant pour eux de grâces divines.*»<sup>677</sup> This liturgical celebration, however, was a lonely experience in the midst of Muslim children who looked bewildered and at times amused by the rite. In addition, he realized that «*Le danger? C'est de s'attribuer un rôle grandiose et irremplaçable, que personne ne vous a confié. Pendant des siècles, on s'est parfaitement passé de vous le voir remplir et l'Esprit Saint ne vous a pas attendu pour agir dans le coeur des gens.*»<sup>678</sup> It is yet another example of how the Dominican friar was forced to live an authentic religious life

<sup>676</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 21.

<sup>677</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 77.

<sup>678</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 78.

away from false piety, spiritual vanity and arrogance. In the face of the religious other he grasped the meaning of spiritual poverty and evangelical humility. He could then writes, «*Un culte à la mesure de Dieu, qui n'a de temple que le coeur des hommes, qui veut l'amour et non les sacrifices, et qui, en fait de rites, agrée surtout les gestes quotidiens, transfigurés, .*»<sup>679</sup> “The Reign of God is like a treasure hidden in a field which a person found... and out of joy sold all she had to buy the field (Mt. 13:44).” De Beaurecueil seems to have found his treasure or the pearl of great price among Kabul street children.

### ***III Mes enfants de Kabul***

The context of civil war and the invasion of Afghanistan by the Red Army from December 27, 1979 to February 15, 1989 disrupted completely the life and routine of the *Maison d'Abraham*. These three years of physical and emotional misery, death and destruction wrought by the war ended a journey started in 1963 and an experience of shared life with Kabul street children since 1965. The experience of war, though important, did not drastically influence de Beaurecueil's *praxis mystica*. Furthermore, his war experience was too short (three years) to alter significantly the entire stay (twenty years). Etienne Gill and Sylvie Heslot edited and published a trail of letters that de Beaurecueil wrote from December 1979 until his 1983 departure.<sup>680</sup> The editors organized the letters in three volumes entitled, *Lettres d'Afghanistan de Serge de Beaurecueil: chronique d'un témoin privilégié*, (Vol. 1, 1979: *La terreur*; Vol. 2, 1980: *Au bord du désespoir*; and Vol. 3, 1981-83: *L'impasse*.) In these letters, de Beaurecueil describes the tragedy that befell Afghanistan and particularly his household. These accounts do not reflect the views of an insider close to the government or the rebellion forces battling the Soviet army and its local

<sup>679</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 61.

<sup>680</sup> See de Beaurecueil, *Chronique I, II, III*.ed. E. Gill and S. Heslot.

allies, but the diaries of an advisor at Lycée Esteglāl and the *padar* of the *Maison d'Abraham*. His narratives are stories of the disappearance and incarceration of his 'children,' the dire consequences of a civil war, the sinister sound of army choppers over Kabul, and people's unbearable tension and deep anxiety. These circumstances foster a living hell environment. These accounts are naïve at the time, but also perceptive and nuanced. This collection of letters portray the appalling turn of his adventure and particularly the demise of a dream: to live the rest of his life in Kabul and die in the land of his master. Pérennès writes «*Le récit de Serge est une chronique au jour le jour, véritable chemin de croix de tout un peuple dont il est solidaire jusqu'au bout. On ne peut résumer de telles pages, souvent écrites comme on jette une bouteille à la mer, au creux du désespoir.*»<sup>681</sup>

These «*Chroniques d'un témoin privilégié*» and Rahimi's documentary movie, *Nous avons partagé le pain et le sel*, raised serious questions. The fate of many children turned sour and their lives were threatened because the Soviet and Afghan authorities used all means including these children to force the Dominican friar out of the country. He was accused of being a spy for western capitalist countries. Even though, his household did not survive more than a year after the invasion, would his earlier departure from Kabul have prevented this disastrous outcome? His sense of hospitality for and solidarity with the people of Afghanistan created an ethical dilemma similar to the predicament of many religious men and women living among Muslims (or others for that matter) in time of war and civil unrest.<sup>682</sup> In this case, the longer de Beaurecueil stayed in Kabul, the longer some

<sup>681</sup> Pérennès, «*Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009,*» 3.

<sup>682</sup> The civil war in Algeria provides two perfect examples: the murder of seven Monks from the Monastery of Notre-Dame de l'Atlas in Tibehirine in March 1996, and the assassination of the Bishop of Oran, Pierre Claverie, in August 1996. See, Pérennès' biography entitled *Pierre Claverie: un Algérien par alliance* (Paris: Cerf, 2000) and Michot's *Le statut du moine*. There are of course, many other similar cases around the world within or without a Muslim community.



of the youngsters suffered severely. He was torn apart between leaving the country and staying in solidarity with those he cared for deeply. For many Christian religious men and women, the example of Jesus of Nazareth and his words are the lynchpin of their choices. Passages such as, “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends,” (Jn.15:13) and the ethical demand to stay with the suffering other loom large. In his civil war diaries, de Beaurecueil refers to “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Mt, 5: 11-12).<sup>683</sup> Nevertheless, did the Dominican friar stay too long in Kabul because of a twisted savior complex, or for a pursuit of martyrdom or holiness? Was he responsible for the ordeal of some of his protégés? In times of civil war, a decision to stay or leave is laden with unbearable consequences. Despite the horrible circumstances of his departure, he continued to work for the well being of his Kabul children, and many of them found asylum in France. His sincerity and compassion were not a misplaced pursuit of holiness or martyrdom. The poverty and helplessness of Kabul street children was not an opportunity for a show but a tragedy to remedy.<sup>684</sup> He left heartbroken and felt guilty of betraying the very people he called his icons. He estimated that solidarity with the suffering other outweighs the risks. It is no wonder that on August 23, 1983, a few days before his departure from Kabul, he sent a letter to a priest friend, Jean d’Auferville, in Leaz (France), to summarize the agony and tragic end of the *Maison d’Abraham*.

*Mon vieux Jean, c’est l’agonie. J’en ai marre de passer mes nuits à pleurer. Je dois partir, sans quoi je deviendrai fou. Six de mes gosses arrêtés et le septième, (seize ans) mort il y a deux jours d’une occlusion intestinale à cause de la stupidité*

<sup>683</sup> Lettre d’Afghanistan, July 23, 1983. *Chronique III* ed. E. Gill and S. Heslot, 158.

<sup>684</sup> The BBC report on September 7, 2010 about “The sexually abused dancing boys of Afghanistan” is a chilly reminder of what could have happened to any of these boys who ended up at the *Maison d’Abraham*. See (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia>).

*de ses parents. A qui le tour? ... A croire que désormais, je leur porte malheur. Dis à Georges que je m'inscris au club des pommés ... Et dis à tous ceux de nos amis qui savent ce que c'est que de sangloter comme je le fais en t'écrivant que je suis leur frère ... Lamentable!*  
*Le padar, héros d'aventure lointaine, n'existe plus. ...*  
*Je reste tout seul à sangloter en t'écrivant ...*  
*Je hurle «du fond de l'abîme», mon vieux Jean ...*  
*Dis à tous les amis de prier pour moi, de «gueuler» pour nous auprès du Seigneur!<sup>685</sup>*

Obviously, the Dominican friar shared equally the tragedy of his household and this prove his sincerity and solidarity with the suffering other.

### **1 La maison d'Abraham**

*Afghanistan Demain* is the proud heir to the life and work of de Beaurecueil in Kabul. The N.G.O. was founded by Ehsān Mehrangais, one of his 'children,' in 2001. De Beaurecueil was the honorary president until his death in 2005. The organization seeks to perpetuate the spirit of the *Maison d'Abraham* which was tragically interrupted by the Soviet invasion<sup>686</sup>. Mehrangais writes, «*J'ai créé cette association pour aider ces enfants qui ont tout perdu et aussi pour rendre hommage au père Serge de Beaurecueil qui a consacré sa vie aux enfants démunis avec cet esprit de tolérance qui a toujours guidé son action.*»<sup>687</sup> Faithful to de Beaurecueil's legacy, the organization is devoted to feeding, clothing, educating and providing health care to a number of children who live on and from the street of Kabul. This section focuses on de Beaurecueil's eventful life in Kabul through his book, *Mes enfants de Kabul*, which chronicles the legacy *Afghanistan Demain* would like to perpetuate.

In poem a written a few weeks before he departed Kabul, de Beaurecueil sighs:

<sup>685</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Chronique III*, ed. Gill & Heslot 159 - 60; Rahimi, *Nous avons*.

<sup>686</sup> De Beaurecueil and his children, Table 5.

<sup>687</sup> www.Afghanistan-demain.org; also «Postface à la nouvelle édition,» *Mes enfants*, 219 - 223.

*Solitude*

*Si chaud et si douillet que soit le nid, un jour les oisillons s'envolent.  
 Et les plus beaux romans d'amour se terminent souvent dans les larmes.  
 La piste, je le pressentais, s'égarerait dans le désert.  
 Admirable aventure, qui se continuera Dieu sait comment et Dieu sait où.  
 Vingt ans d'amour et de bonheur, inoubliables!  
 Maison vide, mais peuplée d'absents ...  
 Albums de photographies feuilletées ... Visages d'enfants rayonnants, tirés de  
 tant de misères!  
 Autant d'icônes, resplendissantes de la lumière de Dieu.  
 Chacun d'entre eux recelant dans son cœur tant de misères, tant de trésors.  
 Prématurément pour certains, il leur faut désormais voler de leurs propres ailes.  
 Pourront-ils faire face aux tempêtes?  
 Echapperont-ils aux rapaces? aux chasseurs ...?  
 Regard tourné vers l'avenir, sanglant peut-être, le leur et le mien tout ensemble.  
 ... Seigneur, quoi qu'il arrive, protège mes enfants.<sup>688</sup>*

De Beaurecueil wrote this poem after hell broke loose and his household fell apart. The poem recalled a period bygone where through trials and tribulations a community was established. The stories of these children intertwined with his journey in a land of constant re-imagination of life. In Kabul, the Dominican friar experienced what it meant to rely on God's providence (*tawakkul*), to trust the strangers or the religious other and to remain faithful to the Spirit of truth. In such a case where doubt and interrogation crept in too easily, where adversity and dire poverty seemed connatural to the land, de Beaurecueil relied on signs to continue his journey. These signs were lampposts on the road or the 'monk's lamp' with its glimmer that made the heart of a solitary traveler beat with gladness, at the thought that through the unfathomable desert night, the fragile light was like the joyful sign of fraternal presence. His Afghan friends and above all the 'children,' Ghāffar, Mirdād, Ehḥsān, Zāher, Waḥḥed, Sultān etc ..., were such lampposts.<sup>689</sup>

His community in Kabul was put under the patronage of Abraham. De Beaurecueil paralleled his call to Abraham's. As God summoned the patriarch to journey to the

<sup>688</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 8 - 9; *Mes enfants*, 7 - 8. (Written in Kabul, August 8, 1983 on the feast of St. Dominic.)

<sup>689</sup> See Table 5 de Beaurecueil and his children.

promised land (Gn. 12, 1), the Dominican friar believed he was as well led by God to the mountains of Afghanistan. Like Abraham he did not know where the promised land was and when he would arrive. Like Abraham he left his country, friends and religious community to live elsewhere and for him it meant to commune with a number of orphans and street children, sick and crippled little ones in Kabul's hospitals. Like Abraham only God knew why and how the journey would unfold. He did not have a blue print or a road map for Kabul's adventure. Just as Ur and Harrān were just stages on the way to the promise land for Abraham, so were Paris and Cairo on the way to Kabul in his case. He

notes:

*C'est en pensant à tout cela que j'ai choisi Abraham comme patron de ma petite maison de Shār-é-Naw. En entrant dans l'Ordre de saint Dominique, il y aura bientôt trente ans, en entendant le Père Chenu me parler de l'Égypte, en partant pour ce pays en 1946, comment aurais-je pu supposer que ma Terre Promise était beaucoup plus loin, dans les montagnes de l'Asie Centrale? Dieu m'y a conduit pas à pas, et je reconnais maintenant les étapes précises de l'itinéraire, dont le sens m'avait échappé lorsque je m'y trouvais. ... Ur et Harān, Paris et Le Caire, ne seront désormais pour moi que des lieux de préparation et de passage, pleins certes de chers souvenirs.*<sup>690</sup>

He left his birthplace to go share bread and salt, to meet God in the Afghans, to intercede and substitute for them, to find and build a family. But, for a Dominican friar such adventure was not a given. He knew the preaching of the Gospel and the itinerant life were intertwined but were irreducible to an institutional religious life or church organization. Many of the residents of the *Maison d'Abraham* were crippled by birth defects, malnutrition, neglect, abuse and maltreatment. Many were abandoned and orphaned boys who slept in the public parks in warm weather, or sought out doorways and boxes in winter. By strange coincidence and unusual circumstances they arrived at the *Maison d'Abraham* and a fictive kinship was formed between a friar and Muslim children.

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<sup>690</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 16.

Pictures of the Dominican friar at home with his ‘family’ at dinner time seemed surreal. His community was made of Pashtun, Tajik, Hazāra, Nuristani and Baloch, some were Sunni, others Shī‘ī or Isma‘īlī. What had become of his years of erudite scientific research on Islamic mysticism? He earned two doctorates<sup>691</sup> and was appointed professor at the University of Kabul in 1962 to teach the history of Islamic mysticism and technique of editing ancient manuscripts. He left research to teach at the University faculty, then abandoned his position to teach in the secondary and primary schools, and later became an advisor and infirmarian to the little ones. No wonder unrelenting questions and doubts continued to plague his adventure. The following questions refused to go away: did he make the right decision, should he continue to care for orphans, crippled and street children or return to his scholarly work on the Pīr of Herāt? Was he doing the right thing to gather Muslim boys from different religious and ethnic background in his compound? After ten years in Kabul, he offered this grueling and honest examination of conscience:

*J’ai toujours eu en horreur les ‘examens de conscience’ et les ‘révisions de vie’. Il est si difficile de voir clair en soi! On ne s’avoue souvent que ce qu’on veut, laissant dans l’ombre ce qu’il serait trop humiliant de reconnaître. Et puis ‘réviser’ sa vie laisse supposer qu’on la tient en main, qu’on peut disposer de soi à sa guise. L’expérience montre qu’il n’en est rien. Nous sommes ‘conditionnés’ par tant de choses, dont la plus grande partie nous échappe! N’empêche qu’après dix ans passés avec les enfants, à traîner dans les hôpitaux, à laisser tomber mes études et s’effriter le cadre religieux de ma vie, je me posais quelquefois des questions. Me justifier était facile: l’amour des pauvres, le ‘laisser venir à moi les petits enfants’ de l’Evangile, la disponibilité du cœur, les contraintes de la vie amenant à abandonner ce qui est secondaire pour se donner entièrement à l’essentiel, la purification de la foi aux dépens des pratiques routinières de la religion, etc. Mais il était aussi facile, bien que moins glorieux, d’imaginer le revers de la médaille: satisfaction d’aider les autres, rattrapage d’une paternité charnelle à laquelle j’avais renoncé, voire relents de pédophilie, sublimation maladroite d’un certain sadisme, récupération d’une vocation manquée, ... négligence et laisser-aller en matière de prière et de pratique sacramentale, et on pourrait continuer la liste ...*<sup>692</sup>

<sup>691</sup> In 1946, he completed a Doctorate in theology and a Licentiate in letters. In February 1971, he received a *Doctorat d’État* at the Sorbonne for his works on Anṣārī.

<sup>692</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 147.

In the face of these seminal questions on which his entire life hung two signs pointed the way. First, Ghaffār's invitation to share bread and salt and above all Anṣārī would provide the ultimate sign. This latter answer was reminiscence of Elijah's experience in 1Kg. 8 - 12. Similar to Elijah, de Beaurecueil did not receive a boisterous and triumphant answer, but a whisper, a fleeting sign pointing to the right direction. Indeed, the last sign arrived in 1976. By that time, de Beaurecueil had since 1965 abandoned his erudite work on the master's corpus of teachings and devoted himself solely to the education and health care of some Kabul street children. The nagging question was – should he continue to care for the well being of the boys or return to academia? The answer came on the commemoration of the millennium of the birth of Anṣārī in May 4, 1976. On the occasion, Beaurecueil had a chance to travel to the shrine of the master in Herāt. Duprée files this account:

In the early evening, which so often bathes Herāt in an earthly light, Serge sat before the tomb of Anṣārī and closed his eyes to meditate. As reported later, he asked the questions which plagued him and demanded of Anṣārī: 'O Pīr of Herāt, you brought me to Afghanistan. But what should I do now?' As he meditated, Serge became aware that all sounds of man and nature had died away. Silence! Then he opened his eyes. Sitting before him were two little boys, huddled together, contemplating this strange *khareji* (foreigner) who sat so respectfully in front of the tomb of Anṣārī. One of the boys, it turned out, claimed to be a direct descendant of the Khwāja 'Abdullāh 'Anṣārī, Pīr-i-Herāt.<sup>693</sup>

De Beaurecueil believed in signs and saw in these little boys' answer his master's agreement with his life. His care for Kabul's abandoned and poor children did not distance him from mysticism or betray his master. His daily work at Lycée Isteqlāl, visits to hospitals, shared bread and salt and the tedious routine of living with children were all signs

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<sup>693</sup> Duprée, "Serge de Beaurecueil" *South Asia Series*, 6.

of faithfulness to the essentials. The Dominican friar turned *padar* could then write at the end of his book, *Mes enfants de Kabul*:

*Ces enfants que vous avez appris à connaître ne sont que des enfants de Kaboul parmi bien d'autres. Ceux que la providence a mis sur mon chemin, pour leur faire partager mon aventure.*

*Vous les avez vus arriver, après bien des misères de tous ordres. Vous les avez vus s'intégrer dans la maison et constituer cette famille, où on grandit ensemble, où on est heureux, malgré les vicissitudes de la vie, de la révolution et de la guerre. Il vous manque seulement d'avoir entendu leurs rires. 'La gloire de Dieu, c'est l'homme vivant' disait saint Irénée. De ces enfants, je vous ai raconté l'histoire qui se confond avec la mienne.<sup>694</sup>*

Ironically, it was in the land of Islam that the word *padar*, father or *père* made complete sense. In the Muslim world the attribute of father to a celibate man was an oddity. But, it was in Kabul that everyone called de Beaurecueil *padar*. Muslims as well as his French friends and other foreigners use the same word, for the former, he was the *padar* of the *Maison d'Abraham* and for the latter, he was a priest and a friar. One of his 'children' Mirdād, who joined the compound at a very young age and never knew any other father figure than the Dominican priest took *Pedari* as his last name. For his colleagues at school, his neighbors, the physicians at the hospital such as Dr. Rahimi and Gaush, the Little Sisters of Jesus, de Beaurecueil was the *padar* in both the human and spiritual sense. People recognized in him the role of a father, a spiritual father but also a father who provided for his adoptive children. In a society where it was unacceptable to call God a father, the people of Kabul saw in him a man of God and a sign of God's mercy on these children. Like God's compassion, de Beaurecueil's care for these children baffled many visitors. Each year, many children came, some stayed as they needed to, some longer some for a brief visit. Many went to school for the first time in their life. They learned to walk again, were cured of a debilitating disease and many went on to have a carrier. He did not

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<sup>694</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 211.

perform miracles but thanks to an enduring work, what Jules Monchanin called “*une patience géologique*” and God’s providence a number of Kabul orphans and street children made a life for themselves.

De Beaurecueil’s utter compassion for and revolt against suffering and ill-treated children could be traced back to his early childhood or the circumstances of his early religious formation. He came from a family that broke down early. His parents divorced when he was fifteen. Even though no one can deny a certain childhood’s influence, one would be hard pressed to find in his writing a clear link between his childhood’s drama and his compassion for suffering children. To be certain, his early Dominican life gave him ample opportunities to work with youngsters. During WWII, he worked briefly with youngsters at Chantier de Jeunesse in Mont-Clergeon in Haute-Savoie. After ordination to the priesthood, he worked with handicapped children, then with boy scouts in Albon and their families under the supervision of Madame Delpech. Then, thanks to a third order Dominican, Blanche, he ministered for the first time to street children called ‘*la bande à Nono.*’ He remarked :

*Quand aujourd’hui je repense aux polios de Saint-Fargeau, à la ‘bande à Nono’ au Petit Prince, je ne peux que m’étonner de cet étrange compagnonnage, qui me ramène à ma maisonnée d’aujourd’hui. Alors, déjà, j’étais voué à être aux côtés de ceux qui doivent lutter tout petits.* <sup>695</sup>

At any rate, when he met a distraught child on a street or in a hospital, «*il rentrait dans une sorte de ravissement qui balayait tout sur son passage.*»<sup>696</sup> Hence, at the *Maison d’Abraham* children arrived unannounced. He would be the first to recognize that «*les enfants ce n’est pas toujours drôle,*» but no argument such as the difficulty to manage a large household where children turned upside down the entire living quarters could hamper

<sup>695</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 21.

<sup>696</sup> Gill, «*Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009*» 2



his enthusiasm. On the contrary, these children were his icons, divine signs who always arrived on a symbolic day: the feast of St. Dominique, his solemn profession, his ordination etc. There were enough anniversary dates to welcome them any day of the week and enough room and food to accommodate them. Gill remarks:

*La paternité divine de Serge prenait toute sa dimension quand il s'agissait d'aller au chevet d'un enfant malade, ou de soigner des plaies ayant du mal à cicatriser. Il tombait alors dans une sorte d'extase où l'enfant devenait icône de Christ. Il le soignait avec une infinie douceur, une infinie patience. Rien d'autre n'existait alors. Si l'enfant malade était l'icône du Christ souffrant, Serge était l'icône de la bonté et de la miséricorde.*<sup>697</sup>

In Rahimi's documentary movie, he said "children must be loved and respected, they are the very face of God, Christ promised the reign of God to them, they are my icons, and each one of them is a mystery, a history and a poem."<sup>698</sup>

## 2 Icons

Rahimi's documentary movie is correctly subtitled. «*Le père de Beaurecueil feuillette avec Atip Rahimi l'album de famille de ses orphelins de Kaboul.*» Rahimi tracks the journey of a number of the *Maison d'Abraham's* former residents who live in France or between Kabul and Paris. For de Beaurecueil and his 'grow-ups' children, who are fathers and husbands today, to walk the path of their common destiny is in itself remarkable. The movie portrays well their unique adventures and fate but underlines their common struggles. The lot of a dire life and the misery of a childhood are transformed through time to a meaningful human life. Their stories mingle with the Dominican friar's religious journey and give birth to deeply moving biographies. His book, *Mes enfants de Kaboul*, recounts the biographies of children whose lives went unnoticed. Mirdād's painting

<sup>697</sup> Gill, «*Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009*» 5.

<sup>698</sup> Rahimi, *Nous avons*, (chapter 3)

captured best the full meaning of their adventures. They were like a chain of mountains, where each peak stretched toward the sun; all of them converged to one point. Different and unique but they were called to share a destiny and a journey that they could not phantom. The reasons were beyond all of them but to the best of their know-how, and their enthusiasm, and hospitality, they wrote redemptive stories about the *Maison d'Abraham*.

Among his 'children,' de Beaurecueil liked to start with Ghaffār, who never lived in the house but initiated the movement and provided a theological *raison d'être* for his adventure. The second one was Del-Agha, who was completely crippled and wheeled himself on the street all day long to ask for hand outs around Lycée Esteqlāl. De Beaurecueil met him daily on his way back and forth from the school. One day he asked the boy if he could come and help his cook and in return receive food, shelter and clothes instead of sitting on the street for hand outs. Del-Agha's father objected and after much negotiation a deal was struck. He recalled:

*On s'accorda pour tenter un essai de trois jours. Tout de suite, le vieux Bāba Golāb, mon cuisinier l'adopta. Et même s'il s'ennuyait un peu, Del-Agha décida de rester. Je voulais qu'il apprenne un métier. Mon voisin, un tailleur, accepta de lui apprendre à coudre. Je le fis opérer afin qu'il puisse étendre les jambes, condition nécessaire pour l'appareiller.*<sup>699</sup>

Then, Rassul «*merveilleux et insupportable*,»<sup>700</sup> arrived to keep Del-Agha company. Del-Agha was Tajik and sunni but Rassul was Hazāra and Shī'ah and the cook Babā Golāb, a Pashtun and sunni could not digest what he saw. «*Pour Del-Agha, ça allait, il était Tadjik et sunni, mais devoir cuisiner pour un Hazara chiite, un petit bonhomme de rien du tout, ça dépassait son entendement.*»<sup>701</sup> The third to arrive was Mirdād at a very young age.<sup>702</sup> He was Rassul's half brother. He was maybe the dearest child who stayed with the *padar*.

<sup>699</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 68.

<sup>700</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 69.

<sup>701</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 70.

<sup>702</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Mes enfants*, 72 - 79. (Mirdād's story)

When he was sent to school and asked: what was his father's name, he replied: 'de Beaurecueil.' His story is maybe the most emotional and in so many ways he is the living example of the Dominican friar's success story in Kabul. De Beaurecueil writes about Mirdād: *«L'orphelin rejeté, exploité, persécuté était devenu un petit garçon rieur et épanoui, La raison ? Il me la donna, en me racontant son histoire: «tout le monde m'aimait; ça, je ne n'oublierais jamais!»*<sup>703</sup> There were many tragic and unfortunate stories particularly during the civil wars, but, also enduring stories of children whose lives were turned to the best because they met the *padar* of *Maison d'Abraham*. The list goes on with Ibrahim, Cher-Agha, Besmellāh, Mohad Ali, and many others. They were originally from Herāt, Bāmiān, Panjchīr, Ghazni, Jalālabad, Nuristān etc ... It was just a handful of Kabul children, less than 100 during twenty years. One might argue that it was a drop in the ocean of poverty and neglect, of course, but for these children, the *padar* made all the difference in their lives.

De Beaurecueil's life in Kabul was not only about his hospitality toward the Afghan but also the Afghan generosity to a Christian who lived as one of them. He tried with the help of his Muslim neighbors to live the Gospel. Thousands miles away from his country, in a forsaken land where people are poor and the landscape is austere and yet breathtaking, a unique love affair blossomed between them and the Dominican friar. He was a fool for God among Muslims and his 'children' gave him a sense of human and spiritual paternity that he could have never dreamt of. In calling him *padar*, the Afghan recognized in him shared human and religious values. They welcomed him and taught him to see with new eyes, and he recognized them as members of the reign of God, to use a Christian term. His life echoed Christian Duquoc's insightful reading of Jesus of Nazareth's life and ministry:

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<sup>703</sup> De Beaurecueil. *Mes enfants*, 79.

*La souveraineté du Christ renvoie à Jésus de Nazareth qui a préféré, dans son parcours, écarter la toute-puissance imaginaire et assurer le risque qu'encourt en ce monde la justice fragile et l'amour discret. Il a estimé plus bénéfique aux hommes ce retrait hors de tout éclat. Le Ressuscité par le don de l'Esprit invite l'Eglise et les croyants à suivre un chemin analogue: il rompt avec l'espoir illusoire, il ouvre à une espérance lucide et solide, il a pour socle la foi qui surmonte le doute engendré par l'éclat tamisé du Règne de Dieu.*<sup>704</sup>

De Beaurecueil's *via unitiva* was a journey characterized not by a systematic speculation on religious life or the elaboration of a theoretical framework within which all elements of a Dominican life can be explained and situated in relationship to each other and to the whole. His pastoral mysticism assigned priority to experience rather than to allow theological conjecture to prescribe and limit his ministry, because experience enjoys a real priority over theory in relation to life. The adventure at *Maison d'Abraham* was not governed by logical necessity but contingency and, at time, seemed chaotic and meaningless. He acknowledged the historical character of his religious life and therefore the partial nature of even the best of human knowledge, the relativity of his own position and the real limitations of human freedom. As Schneiders sees it "it is a sure instinct for the real nature of religious life which is not a static essence to be described and analyzed but first and foremost a life to be lived, and historical reality which is ever-changing and unpredictable."<sup>705</sup>

His religious life did not start with definitions, laws, or propositions about his erudition in Islamic mysticism, and to deduce from that what life is or should be in Kabul. He tended to examine his lived experience and tried to express its significance through his daily encounter with Afghans. He abandoned exclusive and triumphant theologies for an articulation of religious life in dynamic evangelical terms. He tested the validity of theories about religious life by their adequacy to his experience among Muslims. His *praxis mystica*

<sup>704</sup> Christian Duquoc, *L'unique Christ. La symphonie différée* (Paris: Cerf, 2002), 255.

<sup>705</sup> Sandra Schneiders, *New Wine-Skins*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 2 - 3.

itself was tested against the Gospel criterion: “By their fruits you shall know them.” (Mt 7:20).

In Kabul from 1963 to 1983, and despite the ups and downs, de Beaurecueil's experience embodied a Christian solidarity with Muslims, a fidelity to the Gospel's ideals of equality and simplicity, a repudiation of elitism and the privileges of pseudo-clericalism, and finally the crucial role of freedom and responsibility. Among Muslims, he experienced the sacred not so much in high Christology (Eucharistic celebration, silent meditations, and daily horarium) but in simple and mundane human gestures: share a meal, attend and nurse a child to health, listen to, teach and admonish another one, laugh and cry with their families. It was the realization of the unfathomable presence of God in the terribleness of daily life. In Kabul, he understood what it really meant to rely on God's providence, *tawakkul* and surrender the future to God's will. He concludes admirably:

*Reste pour moi à continuer l'aventure, au jour le jour. Mon chemin bifurquera-t-il? S'enfoncera-t-il dans la boue, dans la rocaïlle, dans le désert? Dieu seul le sait, qui l'a tracé. 'À chaque jour suffit sa peine' a dit Jésus. Ainsi grandissent les enfants, sans se demander si demain ils attraperont la jaunisse ... ou sauteront sur une mine. Et, pour celui qui nous conduit, mille ans sont comme un jour qui passe.*<sup>706</sup>

This chapter concludes de Beaurecueil's spiritual path and presents the result of a life long journey from Aristocratic Catholic France to a breathtaking landscape and yet sadly wretched Afghanistan. The Dominican friar's *via illuminativa* and *unitiva* are testimonies to the transformative power of hospitality given to and received from the religious other. Nonetheless, there is a caveat in de Beaurecueil's life journey worthy of attention. His life in Kaboul and particularly his ecclesiology and soteriology were questioned by his own brothers like Anawati and Jomier. His refusal and almost dismissive

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<sup>706</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 8.

attitude toward the institutional church and total freedom from the IDEO strained his relationship with many friars. Besides, Marie Dominique Chenu, Charles Avril (d. 1978), André Gouzes, and a few other friars who supported him all along, many were either suspicious or unsettled with his choices and actions. At any rate, he managed to live a Christian religious life among Muslims and was open to the signs of the times. His radical belief in the power of the Spirit to guide and lead his actions, did sustain him deeply. He befriended people of good will regardless of religions and culture. Many in the French community of Kabul were atheists and agnostics, however, they were closer to him than many of his own Dominicans brothers.<sup>707</sup> His appreciation of the otherness of the religious or cultural other deserves attention. The next chapter would try to articulate the question of hospitality, otherness, and responsibility to and for the other by borrowing Emmanuel Lévinas's philosophy of the other, Paul Ricoeur's ethical dimension of the self, and Jacques Derrida's teachings on hospitality. It is an attempt to craft a theology of de Beaurecueil's understanding of the otherness of the religious other.

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<sup>707</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 19.

## Chapter V Otherness

We have created you all out of a male and a female,  
and have made you into nations and tribes,  
so that you might know each other . . .  
the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one  
who is most deeply conscious of Him  
(Qur'ān, *Sūrat al-Hujurāt* 49:13)

When the face of the other raises itself before me, above me, it is not an appearance that I can include within the sphere of my own representations. To be sure, the other appears, his face makes him appear, but the face is not a spectacle; it is a voice. This voice tells me, "Thou shall not kill." Each face is a *Sania* that prohibits murder. And me? It is in me that the movement coming from the other completes its trajectory: the other constitutes me as responsible, that is, as capable of responding. In this way, the word of the other comes to be placed at the origin of my acts. Self-imputation . . . is now inscribed within the asymmetrical dialogic structure whose origin lies outside me.<sup>708</sup>

*À un certain niveau du silence, l'homme devient un espace sacré. C'est alors qu'il rencontre la Présence dont il est le sanctuaire, dans un dialogue où il découvre sa liberté comme libération de soi. «Qui suis-je?», la question primordiale, entraîne immédiatement, dans cette expérience, la réponse: «Je est un autre.»<sup>709</sup>*

<sup>708</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*. trans. Kathleen Blamey, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 337.

<sup>709</sup> Maurice Zundel, *Je est un autre*, (Québec: Anne Sigier, 1986), 23.

The case of a stranger in an alien land describes de Beaurecueil's mystical conversation with Anṣārī's work and life, particularly the twenty years spent in Kabul. The fate of a stranger depicted in Ṣūfī circles in medieval Islam serves our purpose:

Wherever he sets foot, the stranger is humbled  
 His arm is short, his tongue always blunted  
 Wherever you see him, you find him always without a friend  
 People have one another, but he has no one, to help him.<sup>710</sup>

The posture of an outsider is the predicament of the religious other who is the subject of study or the conversation partner. The land of Anṣārī serves as a crucible for such experience. 'Alī b. al-Jahm's description of the stranger is not far fetched from our case study:

Pity the stranger in a foreign country  
 what has he done to himself  
 He left his friends, and they had no use  
 for the life after he was gone, nor did he.  
 He enjoyed great prestige when he lived near his domicile,  
 but later, when he was far away, he was downcast  
 Being a stranger far away, he says:  
 God is just in whatever He does.<sup>711</sup>

Furthermore, de Beaurecueil's experience fits well Pierre Claverie's phrase: '*être l'autre chez l'autre*' (to be other to the other).<sup>712</sup> The former was a stranger and an other in terms of religion, culture, civilization, geography, and history, to those who were estranged and alienated or made other in their own land –Kabul street children. This encounter between 'these two otherness' is rooted in a mystical conversation and a master-disciple relationship. In this exchange, the Dominican friar tested and risked all his presuppositions

<sup>710</sup> Quoted by Franz Rosenthal. "The Stranger in Medieval Islam" *Arabia*, Vol. 44, no.1, (1997): 55.

<sup>711</sup> Rosenthal, "The Stranger in Medieval Islam," *Arabia*, 46.

<sup>712</sup> Pierre Claverie, *L'humanité Plurielle* (Paris: Cerf, 2008), introduction. «*Nourri d'une intuition intelligente et d'une hospitalité lucide apprenons à être l'autre chez l'autre.*»



and false essentialisms. He learned to journey with cultural and theological complexities and to confront overlapping faith traditions that cut across artificial and simplistic world-views. This chapter's interest in otherness and the religious other stems from the following questions: How did de Beaurecueil practice hospitality to the stranger or receive hospitality from the other? How did he discern the face of the other as a gift of God's self at the heart of particularity and difference? The answer to these questions is rooted in the Dominican friar's mystical and pastoral *sitz im leben*. These questions underscore a crucial point at the heart of our theoretical framework: the difference and the otherness of another human being, particularly the religious other. Our task is to underline in bold traces, or the 'fingers pointing to the moon,' to borrow from Zen Buddhism. The moon in this case is the otherness of the other and the demands that the face of the religious other places upon the self. Particularly, children's suffering has summoned de Beaurecueil to responsibility throughout his entire religious life, but Kabul's street children have brought his ethical consciousness to a different level. This chapter probes selfhood and the hermeneutics of self through the narrative of de Beaurecueil's life. The dynamic and dialectic of his relationship with his household is the place of reciprocity, complex intersubjectivity, encounter, but also miscommunication and conflict of interpretations, *rencontre et malentendu interculturel et religieux*.

Obviously, de Beaurecueil built his *praxis mystica* upon his Christian faith, and particularly, Jesus' life and ministry. He found, indeed, enough examples in both Christian and Hebrew scriptures to serve as examples and justification for his pastoral theology (see chapter 4). In addition, he believed throughout his life in signs or divine promptings. These signs were lampposts on his journey. He saw in them the invitation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>713</sup>

<sup>713</sup> See chapter 3 of this study. A critical reader might question the meaning of these signs, however, no one can provide a clear and distinct proof of what these signs really meant. It is up then to de Beaurecueil to

His book, *Je crois à l'étoile du matin* is, in our view, a clear proof of his faith. The collection of articles<sup>714</sup> in the book are testimonies to a life lived in confidence in this line, “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence for things unseen.” (Heb, 11:1). He writes, «*Lancez-vous dans l'inconnu à la suite du Maître, parfois à tâton, jusqu'à être éventuellement crucifié avec lui pour la libération de vos frères.*»<sup>715</sup> He conceded to the wisdom beyond comprehension, God's unfathomable providence. *He adds «Je crois au Dieu qui me guide pas à pas, m'inspire par moments, parfois apparemment m'abandonne, et qui me laisse toujours mauvaise conscience avec son amour qui sans limites ni défaillance, qui sans relâche se poursuit.»*<sup>716</sup> This radical faith in the divine plan is congruent with his mystical conversation with a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī master who exemplifies *tawakkul* during his life. De Beaurecueil's mystical conversation with Anṣārī's work and life brought him to Kabul, and the children of the city open an unexpected window, a ministry of hospitality to and responsibility for the vulnerable other, who overwhelms and shatters our traditional conception of religious life. His faithfulness to this utterly unusual religious life in the eyes of traditional catholic theology is the mysticism therein.

The context of otherness in Kabul has ushered in a different way of living an authentic *praxis mystica*. In our view, only partially do the Bible and the friar's own mystical intuitions explain his entire *mystique du terrain*. This chapter completes the picture in building upon western modern and post-modern understanding of the context of otherness and hospitality. The following questions are more philosophical and less mystical

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interpret them according to a set of beliefs and in context. The writer has no other recourse but to bracket the aporia and just report on the interpretation given by de Beaurecueil. Duprée, “Serge de Beaurecueil,” *South Asia Series*, 1 - 11.

<sup>714</sup> See the following articles in *Je crois*. Their very titles speak volumes: «Pas de frontière au Royaume de Dieu»; «Tais -toi! Et que reprenne sa lumière»; «Et demeure la face de ton Seigneur»; «La souffrance, mère de la joie».

<sup>715</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 16.

<sup>716</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 21.

or theological: How does one allow the other to speak as the other? How is it possible to know the other as other, without risking the assimilation of the other to the category of sameness? How does one avoid positing an otherness which is simply unknowable? How do we encounter a person of another faith without totalizing the religious other? Emmanuel Lévinas, Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida offer a philosophical language which deciphers best this *praxis mystica*.<sup>717</sup> Therefore, Lévinas's understanding of ethics as 'first philosophy,' and Ricoeur's definition of the "ethical intention as aiming at the good life, with and for others, in just institutions,"<sup>718</sup> and finally, Derrida's philosophy of hospitality, help us better understand de Beaurecueil's unique path. Lévinas's approach to the other frames philosophically de Beaurecueil's encounter with the Afghans. Therefore, the lion's share is given to his thought in the first section, and then Ricoeur extends Lévinas's ethical priority of the other in the second section. Derrida runs through both sections.

### ***I Lévinas: 'The face of the Other'***

De Beaurecueil's life among Afghans is largely studied from the perspective of what he wrote, the testimonies of his French and Afghan friends, and particularly, the stories and memories of the 'children' who lived with him at the *Maison d'Abraham*. This latter group's testimony is extremely valuable because it reflects what his hosts really thought about him. It is regrettable that most of the available testimonies were collected later in these children's life and largely when they arrived in France. Rahimi's documentary movie is a case in point. Even though we lack some material to ascertain his hosts' thoughts

<sup>717</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969); *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Existence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1991); Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990); *The Cambridge Companion to Lévinas*, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Jacques Derrida, *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas*. (Paris: Galilée, 1997); *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar, (New York: Routledge, 2002) will be our main sources for discussion.

<sup>718</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself*, 172.

about him, there is enough evidence in his letters and writings to craft a fair picture of the Afghans' view of the Dominican friar. This investigation is not about what the Afghans thought about him, but which philosophy explains best his *praxis mystica*. Our task is to use Lévinas's philosophical language as a rule of speech to craft de Beaurecueil's theology of hospitality toward the stranger and encounter with the religious other. We will not delve into an exhaustive treatment of Lévinas' corpus, such an endeavor is beyond our scope. Lévinas's critique of the totalizing discourse of western philosophy, his insistence that ethics is the first order of philosophy, and his philosophical treatment of "the question of the other" will help us dig into the complexity of the issue and problematize existing answers and trends of thought. In searching for a theoretical framework to the question of otherness, Lévinas in conversation with Ricoeur help us navigate the post-modern concern with alterity. Barnes explains this concern, "From Foucault's relentless uncovering of hidden power-structures and Derrida's dissection of textual *différance*, post-modernism searches the contexts, the margins and the edge of the known and familiar for what has been, consciously or unconsciously, repressed or occluded."<sup>719</sup> Lévinas asks the ethical question with ever-renewed insistence — the other is needed for my own sense of self. The Afghans have drawn de Beaurecueil out of his protective defense of the same into that never ending journey which alone makes faith possible. In his introductory paper to *The Cambridge Companion*, Simon Critchley explains Lévinas's idea of 'alterity', "there is something about the other person, a dimension of separateness, interiority, secrecy, or what Lévinas calls '*alterité*' that escapes my comprehension. That which exceeds the bounds of my knowledge demands acknowledgement."<sup>720</sup> De Beaurecueil's experience in Afghanistan fits the legacy of Lévinas's ethical philosophy, namely infinite responsibility for and to the

<sup>719</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 66.

<sup>720</sup> Simon Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge*, 26.

other (in this case to the religious other). The praxis of the ‘ethics of hospitality’ and ‘the epiphany of the face to face encounter’ are exemplified in the Dominican friar’s dedication and care for Afghan street children. His book *Mes enfants de Kabul* is a narrative of such responsibility. The testimonies in Rahimi’s documentary movie, largely, corroborate our view. He called these children his icons, a window into the divine. God knows, however, how these children were at times excessive, unruly, and cunning to others. They were not only culturally and religiously other to de Beaurecueil, but they lived a double otherness: first with a French catholic Dominican as their host, and second, they were estranged from their own communities. Most of them lived on the streets or public parks without a regular family structure. One could use Lévinas’s phrase of ‘radical exteriority’ or ‘the dissymmetry opposition between the self and the other’ to characterize this encounter.

Lévinas is a phenomenal thinker and his work covers a large range of matters and expands over sixty years. Edith Wyschogrod writes in her article “Language and Alterity in the Thought of Lévinas:

The work of Lévinas is such an invocation, an effort at translating incommensurable, a troping of that which cannot be troped, an unassimilable excess that resists apprehension in propositional discourse. This ‘more’ that remains beyond spoken or written language is otherness of the other person, an otherness that cannot be configured as a content of consciousness but that issues an imperative that obliges me to assume responsibility for the other.<sup>721</sup>

His treatment of the question of otherness possesses a great richness, and over time his thought has deepened and radicalized. Lévinas is influenced by two main categories of sources: philosophical (western philosophy from Plato to Heidegger) and non-philosophical (Hebrew Scripture and Talmudic literature).<sup>722</sup> Yet, his work does not set the two sources in

<sup>721</sup> Edith Wyschogrod, “Language and Alterity in the Thought of Lévinas,” in *The Cambridge*, 188.

<sup>722</sup> Lévinas was deeply influenced by his Talmudic master Monsieur Chouchani as well as by Martin Heidegger’s seminal work *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962). According to Critchley, “Lévinas’s work provides powerful descriptions of a whole range of phenomena, both everyday banalities and those that one could describe with Bataille as ‘limit

opposition, but rather, his philosophical work makes explicit and implicit reference to Talmudic literature and to the Hebrew Scripture, while his Talmudic commentaries are rooted in his philosophical research. With great admiration and respect, Lévinas read Martin Heidegger's (d. 1976) ontology and Edmund Husserl's (d. 1938) phenomenology, but later he distances himself from both philosophers. Lévinas's thought developed through different stages. His early work, before World War II, is largely indebted to Husserl and Heidegger, but it is the latter's decisive influence which concerns us primarily.

Lévinas understood that the essential contribution of Heidegger is his critique of intellectualism. Ontology is not a contemplative theoretical endeavor, as it was for Aristotelian philosophy and the like, but is rooted in a primary ontology of the existential engagement of human beings in the world which forms the anthropological grounding for ontology (or the question of being).<sup>723</sup> In a nutshell, Heidegger's work involves a fundamental critique of Western philosophy and of course its history. He hoped to provide a radical critique by getting at the roots of what it means for us to "be" at all. His seminal book, *Sein und Zeit* or *Being and Time*, is obviously about the question of the meaning of being, *Dasein* understood as being engaged in the world or being in the world. According to Tom Cheetham:

Everyone who reads *Being and Time* is confronted with the difficult task of making sense of the numerous neologisms. The text is subtle and complex. The notoriously tortuous writing is not difficult because it is abstract. It is difficult because Heidegger is attempting to create a vocabulary that can break through the traditional categories of Western thought into a language which can reveal the most primordial and concrete images but at the same time hidden from our everyday consciousness.<sup>724</sup>

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experiences': insomnia, fatigue, effort, sensuous enjoyment, erotic life, birth and the relation to death. Such phenomena are described with particular memorable power by Lévinas in the work published after the war: *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other*." in *The Cambridge*, 6. See Lévinas, *Existence and Existents*. trans Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978)

<sup>723</sup> Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge*, 9.

*Dasein* is Heidegger's way of naming that about us that has, in some sense, "ontological priority over other entity,"<sup>725</sup> that about us which allows anything to appear at all. This *Dasein* that we are has a complex ontological and phenomenological structure which had not been noticed explicitly before and which Heidegger intends to uncover. In order to begin the revelation of these structures of being, he distinguishes those aspects that pertain to the fundamental structure of *Dasein* from those aspects which are characteristic only of our everyday existence in the world. *Dasein* is "being there." It provides the condition for the possibility of anything being present at all. This is the crucial intuition that will make Heidegger's work so important for Lévinas. The analysis begins with the presence as the fundamental given, and not with a knowing subject, not with any kind of thing at all. For Heidegger, this kind of presence is ontologically prior to the appearance of a subject or an ego, prior to anything as restricted as human consciousness. In this way, writes Cheetham,

Heidegger attempts to stand outside all the vexing metaphysical dualisms: phenomena/noumena, subject/object, idealist/materialist. This analysis is an attempt to provide a way of understanding ourselves and the world which is at once rigorously philosophical and metaphysical but not in any way abstract.<sup>726</sup>

This is a revolutionary ontology within Western philosophical tradition and takes as fundamental a close examination of the way we exist in the world. However, unlike Heidegger's ontology, Lévinas focuses on the ungraspable mystery of otherness. Barnes asserts that, in Lévinas's view, "Heidegger's search for an all-inclusive view of the things through a neutral impersonal vision fails to allow the destabilizing experience of otherness and is the example par excellence of the Western philosophical tradition's quest for a totalizing universal knowledge."<sup>727</sup>

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<sup>724</sup> Tom Cheetham, *The World Turned Inside Out. Henry Corbin and Islamic Mysticism*, (Woodstock (CT): Spring Journal Books: 2003), 5.

<sup>725</sup> Heidegger, *Being*, 62.

<sup>726</sup> Cheetham, *The World*, 4.

<sup>727</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 80

The second stage of Lévinas's work covers the post-war period. Here, he is deeply affected by the event of National Socialism in Germany and the gas chambers of WWII. The defining book of this period is *Totality and Infinity*. In this book, his thought achieves an unprecedented level of complexity and structure. He lays out a new meaning for ethics. According to him, the happiness of the isolated selfish 'me' is questioned through the encounter with the other (*autrui*). The philosophical description of the conditions of this experience or this 'revelation' of alterity is the subject matter of his thought, and the fundamental word is face (*visage*). Unlike Sartre who sees in the other *le regard* Lévinas sees '*le visage*.' Lévinas teaches us that the other is '*visage*' before '*regard*.' Finally, the last stage of his thought is expressed in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. His field of investigation moves to the idea of subjectivity. The key theme is no longer the '*visage*' but infinite 'responsibility' to and for the other. Lévinas's ethics seek to make humanity more human and the best image of that responsibility is comparable to '*la sainteté du saint*' to use a religious term. In *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas*, Derrida recalls a conversation with him in Paris where he set the record straight,

*Un jour, rue Michel-Ange, au cours de l'une de ces conversations dont la mémoire m'est si chère, l'une de ces conversations illuminées par l'éclat de sa pensée, la bonté de son sourire, l'humour gracieux de ses ellipses, il me dit: 'Vous savez, on parle souvent d'éthique pour décrire ce que je fais, mais ce qui m'intéresse au bout du compte, ce n'est pas l'éthique, c'est le saint, la sainteté du saint.'*<sup>728</sup>

Richard Bernstein, in turn, attempts to answer the following question in his concluding essay in *The Cambridge Companion to Lévinas*, "What are the considerations and motivations that lead him [Lévinas] to insist on our asymmetrical and non-reciprocal relation to the other, our infinite responsibility to and for the other?"<sup>729</sup> Following a rigorous

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<sup>728</sup> Derrida. *Adieu*, 15.

<sup>729</sup> Bernstein, "Evil and the Temptation of Theodicy," in *The Cambridge*, 252 - 53.



medieval scholastic method, Bernstein surveys the existing answers before venturing his own at the end:

Some have suggested that the place to begin is with the influence of Heidegger on his thinking, with the way in which much of Lévinas's thought can be viewed as a critical dialogue with Heidegger. Others have suggested that we must go back to Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption*, especially to Rosenzweig's critique of philosophy ('from Iona to Jena') and the very idea of totality that never escapes from the horizon of the dialectic of the same and the other. Still others have argued that the primary source for Lévinas's understanding of ethics is to be found in his interpretation of the Jewish Bible and the rabbinic tradition of the commentary of the Bible. There is something right about all these suggestions (which are not incompatible), but frankly I do not think they go deep enough. They do not answer the question why does Lévinas interpret and use these sources in the way he does? The thesis that I want to explore and defend is that the primary thrust of Lévinas's thought is to be understood as his response to the horror of the evil that has erupted in the twentieth century. I believe that Lévinas's entire philosophic project can best be understood as an ethical response to evil—and to the problem of evil which we must confront after the 'end of theodicy.'<sup>730</sup>

Bernstein's position is right on target, but one can suggest that over sixty years of scholarship, Lévinas's thought is the product of all these sources including Bernstein's view. It is difficult to rank one over the other, and to use Bernstein's own image, it is the "constellation" of all these places that form the bedrock of Lévinas's writings on ethics, responsibility, the alterity of the other (*autrui*), subjectivity and substitution.

The French philosopher's work is dominated by one essential thought. Critchley calls it "Lévinas's big idea."<sup>731</sup> He writes, "Lévinas's work is dominated by one thought, and it seeks to think one thing under an often bewildering variety of aspects."<sup>732</sup> His big idea is: infinite responsibility to and for the other, *le souci de l'autre ou du prochain, attention à autrui*. Lévinas remains faithful to a fundamental experience that grasps us when we feel the nakedness and vulnerability of a face (*visage*). Such vulnerability holds us hostage in the sense that in spite of ourselves, we are summoned to be responsible. "*C'est*

<sup>730</sup> Bernstein, "Evil and the Temptation of Theodicy," in *The Cambridge*, 252.

<sup>731</sup> Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge*, 6.

<sup>732</sup> Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge*, 6

*l'Autre qui m'intime du respect. Je suis l'otage de l'autre.*"<sup>733</sup> Thus, Barnes believes that "what holds [Lévinas's] work together is a deep questioning ethical sensitivity which puts the Other, the other person, at the heart of philosophy."<sup>734</sup> Bernstein borrows from Derrida and writes, "The metaphor that best captures the movement of Lévinas's thinking is the one Derrida uses when he compares it to the crashing of a wave on a beach: always the 'same' wave returning and repeating its movement with deeper insistence."<sup>735</sup> Lévinas faults western philosophy of considering the relation to that which is other as relationship of comprehension and form of totality. The claim is that if I conceive a relation to the other in terms of understanding, symmetry, reciprocity, equality even, then that relationship is totalized.

In the search for an ethic of responsibility toward the other, Lévinas grapples with two important questions among others: "how to allow for the inevitability of the 'alteration' of the subject without risking its fragmentation,"<sup>736</sup> and "how can a being enter in relation with the other without allowing its very self to be crushed by the other?"<sup>737</sup> Lévinas's questions are crucial for a theology of religions and for de Beaurecueil who lived with and among Afghans. The issues of subjectivity and the ever-fractured relationship with otherness appear everywhere in all of Lévinas's texts but also plagued de Beaurecueil's life. The friar's failed attempts to include his household in his liturgical life, his effort to eat and dress like them, his constant search to find a balance between rightful otherness and wrongful alienation were examples of a struggle to enter in relation with the other without allowing its very self to be crushed by the other. This dialectic did not always work and at

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<sup>733</sup> Quoted by Nicolas Antenat. «Respect et vulnérabilité chez Lévinas,» *Le Portique*, no. 11 (2003): 8.

<sup>734</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 68.

<sup>735</sup> Bernstein, "Evil and the Temptation of Theodicy," in *The Cambridge*, 252. See also Derrida "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference* Trans. A. Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), 132.

<sup>736</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 68.

<sup>737</sup> Lévinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1990), 77.

times, either he or the other was crushed.<sup>738</sup> Critchley recognizes the difficulty of the ethical demand in Lévinas's work, but admires his effort:

... the strength of Lévinas's position lies, I would claim, in reminding us of the nature of the ethical demand, a demand that must be presupposed at the basis of all moral theories if those theories are not to lose all connection with both the passions and the apathy of everyday life. Lévinasian ethics might not be a sufficient condition for a complete ethical theory, but it is, in my view, a necessary condition for any such theory.<sup>739</sup>

Lévinas proposes to elevate ethics to the first order of philosophy as a solution to the intractable consequences "of subjectivity and the ever-fractured relationship with otherness."

## 1 Ethics as first philosophy

Lévinas argues for radical ethics in philosophical terms and his position is congruent with the mystical view that the face of the other constitutes an ethical demand. His criticism of the western philosophical tradition reminds theologians and mystics that the ethical demand is a task they must all honor. De Beaurecueil was neither a dogmatic theologian nor a philosopher. Nonetheless, he understood that the ethical demand of the face of the other was an encounter with and a window into the divine presence.<sup>740</sup> The other is not an abstraction or an idea but a concrete face which summons one to responsibility.

Lévinas explains:

<sup>738</sup> There are the stories of many children who came and left, or many others who might have suffered greater alienation because of him. Rahim's documentary show instances where he regretted some actions he took.

<sup>739</sup> Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge*, 28.

<sup>740</sup> In this study, the face of the other as an icon or a window into the divine presence is very different from the mystical idea of the "contemplation of the unbearded" in Persian and South Asian Sūfism. The spiritual practice of gazing upon the face of a beautiful boy, known as *Naẓar ila 'l-murd* (contemplation of the beardless) in Arabic or *shahed bāzī* (witness play) in Persian, consists of realizing the absolute beauty that is God through the relative beauty of the human. A practice often criticized because it leads to pedophilia, homosexuality and tends to mix worship and sodomy. (see Peter Lamborn Wilson). Unlike the "contemplation of the beardless face," in this chapter, the face of the other becomes the face of God as far as it represents the face of the widow, the orphan and the stranger and not that of the a beardless boy. It is not a realization of beauty but the scriptural command to respond to the need of the most vulnerable members of the community.

*L'expérience irréductible et ultime de la relation me paraît être ailleurs: non pas dans la synthèse, mais dans le face à face des humains, dans la socialité, en sa signification morale. Mais il faut comprendre que la moralité ne vient pas comme couche secondaire, au-dessus d'une réflexion abstraite sur la totalité et sans dangers; la moralité a une portée indépendante et préliminaire. La philosophie première est une éthique.*<sup>741</sup>

According to Lévinas, the history of western philosophy since its inception is obsessed with universal synthesis. In other words, philosophy seeks to reduce diversity to a tyrannical totality and denies all forms of alterity. He clarifies his view in *Totality and Infinity* in these words:

*Dans la critique de la totalité que comporte l'association même de ces deux mots, il y a une référence à l'histoire de la philosophie. Cette histoire peut être interprétée comme une tentative de synthèse universelle, une réduction de toute l'expérience, de tout ce qui est sens, à une totalité où la conscience embrasse le monde, ne laisse rien d'autre hors d'elle, et devient ainsi une pensée absolue.*<sup>742</sup>

This imperial totality culminates, Lévinas continues, in Hegelian dialectics or philosophy of systems. "Philosophy is that alchemy whereby otherness is transmuted into sameness by means of the philosopher's stone of knowing."<sup>743</sup> Against this dominant line of thought that violently reduces the other to the same, Lévinas opposes the subjective experience of infinity – the experience of 'the face to face.' He seeks to restore a humanism based not on the reasonable nature of humanity but on the obligation for all us to be our brother's or sister's keeper (the other: *l'autrui* or *le prochain*) without expecting any reciprocity from the other.<sup>744</sup>

Lévinas seeks to bring back ethical thinking to western philosophical tradition which he believes has become fixated on forms of Heideggerian totalizing ontology. He

<sup>741</sup> Lévinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard Cohen, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 85.

<sup>742</sup> Lévinas, *Ethique et infini* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), 79.

<sup>743</sup> Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge*, 16. See Lévinas's critique of epistemology in his "Transcendence and Height," *Basic Philosophical Writings*, trans Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996), 11 - 31.

<sup>744</sup> Marie-Anne Lescourret, *Emmanuel Lévinas*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2005). In this major book, Lescourret offers a comprehensive reading of Lévinas's philosophical thoughts and life journey.

points to the role which the relationship with the other plays in metaphysical reflection. The presence of the other demands an ethics but an ethics which would be more than an exercise in prudent self-interest. Unlike Heidegger who sees ethics as a relatively secondary branch of philosophy, Lévinas sees in ethics the heart of philosophy. «*La morale n'est pas une branche de la philosophie, mais la philosophie première.*»<sup>745</sup> In Heidegger's ontology, the other person is just one of many, one in the crowd or the mass. The other is all known because he or she is part of the crowd that binds and asphyxiates me.<sup>746</sup> Lévinas does not see ethics as a path to personal perfection or achievement, but a responsibility toward the other that no one can escape. No one could replace me and exercise this responsibility on my behalf. "No one can substitute himself for me, who substitutes myself for all."<sup>747</sup> In the words of Critchley, "Lévinas describes this demand, like other moral perfectionists, in exorbitant terms: infinite responsibility, trauma, persecution, hostage, and obsession. The ethical demand is impossibly demanding."<sup>748</sup> Thus, ethics is no longer a divine law imposed from above but the manifestation in every human being of his/her autonomy. Something happens to me and forces me to face the other. «*Rien, en un sens, n'est plus encombrant que le prochain. Ce désir n'est-il pas l'indésirable même.*»<sup>749</sup> Accordingly, this *élan éthique* (in a Bergsonian sense of *élan*) does not come from within but from the revelation of the other. However, who is the other? How could we account for the idea that the revelation of the other imposes an ethical obligation on me?

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<sup>745</sup> Lévinas, *Totalité*, 281.

<sup>746</sup> Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge*, in 12.

<sup>747</sup> Lévinas, *Otherwise*, 136.

<sup>748</sup> Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge*, in 28.

<sup>749</sup> Benny Lévy, *Lévinas: Dieu et la philosophie*, (Paris: Verdier, 2009). 75.

## 2 *Autrui*

Derrida and Lévinas provide adequate answers to our question respectively: «*Autrui est secret parce qu'il est autre.*»<sup>750</sup> «*Si on pouvait posséder, saisir et connaître l'autre, il ne serait pas l'autre. Posséder, connaître, saisir sont des synonymes du pouvoir.*»<sup>751</sup> Lévinas navigates the troubled waters of how one relates to the other who binds us to infinite and non-reciprocal responsibility. First, Lévinas differentiates between two forms of otherness, distinguished by *autre* and *autrui* or *prochain*. *L'autre* refers to anything other, the table, the window and the building across the street. But *autrui* is reserved for the other person, the face with whom I have an ethical relation. Clearly, de Beaurecueil dealt with the Lévinasian understanding of *autrui* or *prochain*. Lévinas uses *autrui* and *prochain* interchangeably. “In the language of transcendental philosophy, the face is the condition of possibility for ethics.”<sup>752</sup> The other (*autrui*) demands response from me but *l'autre* does not necessary do so.<sup>753</sup> Furthermore, Lévinas understands *autrui* in two ways: negatively and positively.

First, negatively, the other is neither me nor something. The other is not something because my relationship with things will not apply to the other. I cannot possess nor even define the other by his/her historical, social, or physical characteristics. The other is inaccessible to my imagination or comprehension. *Le visage*<sup>754</sup> as Lévinas calls it, bewilders the self and leaves him or her wondering. The face resists conceptualization,

<sup>750</sup> Derrida, *Le Monde de L'éducation*, No. 284 of Numéro special Juillet –Août 2001.

<sup>751</sup> Lévinas, *Le temps et l'autre*, (Paris: PUF, 2004), 83.

<sup>752</sup> Critchley, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge*, 16.

<sup>753</sup> Most authors translate Lévinas's *autre* and *Autrui* as ‘other’ and the personal other person, *autrui* or *Autrui*, as Other. Colin Davis, *Lévinas: An Introduction* (Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1997). The author explains, “the former ‘autre’ confirms totality, and the latter ‘autrui’ reveals infinity. I have tried to follow Lévinas's usage. But, I intend to use only the lower case, even where it is clear that the reference is to personal other who reveals infinity.

<sup>754</sup> The English word ‘face’ is not an adequate translation of *visage* in French. Lévinas does not use the French word *face*, he prefers *visage* for a good reason. It seems that we are dealing with a similar translation problem noted earlier in the case of *autrui* and *autre*.

thematization, and definition. As soon one qualifies the other face with an attribute, the other has escaped the definition. The other does not enter into a concept or a genre. Thus, the other is not one's alter ego, another me, a resemblance. *«Autrui en tant qu'autrui n'est pas seulement un alter ego; il est ce que moi, je ne suis pas. Il l'est non pas en raison de son caractère, ou de sa physionomie, ou de sa psychologie, mais en raison de son altérité même.»*<sup>755</sup>

Second, how then could one encounter the other who escapes all conceptualization and categorization? Positively, the relation with the other, according to Lévinas, is the relation to infinity. He writes, *«posséder l'idée d'infini, c'est avoir déjà accueilli Autrui»*<sup>756</sup> and *«Accueillir Autrui, c'est mettre ma liberté en question.»*<sup>757</sup> The other presents him/herself as infinity. Bernhard Waldenfels tries to distinguish totality from infinity:

Totality has to be understood as the reign of the same wherein everything and everybody exist as part of a whole or as cause under the law . . . The totality, which forces everybody into certain roles, is based on violence, on a general war which does not end when the individual's striving for self-preservation makes use of rational means. This totality contrasts with the infinity of the other whose otherness exceeds the limits of any other whatsoever.<sup>758</sup>

The ethical relation to the face of the other person is the social expression of the encounter with infinity. He writes, "The idea of infinity is the social relationship" and again, "The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me, we here name the face."<sup>759</sup> Thus, the ethical relations to the other produces what Lévinas calls "'a curvature of intersubjective space,' that can only be totalized by falsely imagining oneself occupying some God-like position outside of that relation."<sup>760</sup>

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<sup>755</sup> Lévinas, *Le temps*, 75.

<sup>756</sup> Lévinas, *Totalité*, 66.

<sup>757</sup> Lévinas, *Totalité*, 58.

<sup>758</sup> Bernhard Waldenfels. "Lévinas and the face of the other," in *The Cambridge*, 66.

<sup>759</sup> Lévinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 54; and *Totality*, 50.

<sup>760</sup> Lévinas, *Totality*, 291.

Lévinas borrows the idea of ethical relation to the other in terms of infinity from Descartes's Third Meditation, between the *res cogitans* and the infinity of God.<sup>761</sup> The author of *Otherwise than Being* interprets Descartes's idea in a very personal way. He takes from Descartes's argument the idea that the human subject has an idea of infinity, and that idea, by definition, is a thought that contains more than can be thought. The idea of infinity goes beyond our conception of it. There is no coincidence between the reality and the form that infinity takes. We hold within our spirit what our finite intellect cannot perceive. We face the unthinkable so to speak. Lévinas states, «*En pensant l'infini, le Moi d'emblée pense plus qu'il ne pense.*»<sup>762</sup> Thus, in discovering the infinity in them, humans find that their interior gives way to an exterior. He adds, «*posséder l'idée d'infini, c'est avoir déjà accueilli Autrui.*»<sup>763</sup> The infinity of the thought within evokes the idea of the transcendence. Critchley makes plain Lévinas's approach:

It is this formal structure of a thought that thinks more than it can think, that has a surplus within itself that intrigues Lévinas because it sketches the contours of a relation to something that is always in excess of whatever idea I may have of it, that always escapes me. The Cartesian picture of the relation of the *res cogitans* to God through the idea of the infinite provides Lévinas with a picture or formal model of a relation between two terms that is based on height, inequality, non reciprocity and asymmetry.<sup>764</sup>

The presence of the other awakens in the subject the desire to deepen the gulf that separates the other and the subject. This presence brings into the subject the idea of infinity and forces the subject to take notice that the essential aspect of the self is infinitely outside all imaginable totalizing systems. At the end, the subject discovers God through his or her encounter with the other. The encounter with the face of the other is an extraordinary event.

<sup>761</sup> Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge*, 27.

<sup>762</sup> Lévinas, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, (Paris: J. Vrin, 2002), 172. See also *Collected*, 54.

<sup>763</sup> Lévinas, *Totalité*, 66.

<sup>764</sup> Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge*, 14.



Here, the intentionality of the subject cannot locate the other in his or her intellectual activity, nor assign a meaning to the other, nor fit the other in the subject's universe. The other overwhelms completely the image that the subject tries to create. It is impossible to reduce the reality of the other to that of my thought. On the contrary, it is up to the subject to surrender to the infinity of the other. To Husserl's phenomenological intentionality, Lévinas substitutes the schema of asymmetric relationship through which the subject finds his or her fulfillment. "The other is not a phenomenon but an enigma, something ultimately refractory to intentionality and opaque to the understanding."<sup>765</sup> According to Lévinas the relationship of self and other (infinity) is parallel to the encounter between the subject and God. Only the ethical experience gives the possibility to interrogate the absolute and to answer the call, «*La dimension du divin s'ouvre à partir du visage humain*, »<sup>766</sup> or again, «*C'est là que le Transcendant, infiniment Autre nous sollicite et en appelle à nous*. »<sup>767</sup> When the subject faces the other, he or she is exposed not only to the other but to the transcendence where God is located, synonymous with good or infinity. Even though the subject is confined to the realms of temporality and imperfection or limitedness, he or she finds him/herself drawn to the non-temporal and the perfect. In this situation, the subject gets a chance to encounter the divine or the infinite through the face of the other. Léonard Rosmarin explains accurately:

*Peu importe, au fond, la forme particulière que revêt la religion. Le contact avec l'au-delà religieux ne peut se produire en dehors de mon rapport avec mon semblable qui me réclame justice. Dieu ne manifeste ses exigences et ne révèle à travers elle que lorsque mon prochain, humble et hautain à la fois, me bouleverse de fond en comble. Sans ce rapport indispensable entre créature et Créateur, la théologie est un exercice futile.*<sup>768</sup>

<sup>765</sup> Cristchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge*, 8.

<sup>766</sup> Lévinas, *Totalité*, 56.

<sup>767</sup> Lévinas, *Totalité*, 50.

<sup>768</sup> Léonard Rosmarin, «La trace de l'infini dans la l'oeuvre d'Emmanuel Lévinas, » *Voix plurielles*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2004), 6.

On this note, mystics and religious would adhere to Lévinas's position. Here at least, philosophy and theology meet to unveil the heart of a mystical vision of the other. De Beaurecueil makes no reference to the work of Lévinas in his writings, however, it is our conviction that he would sense in Lévinas's writing an air of authenticity, a return to the worldview of the gospels, a responsibility to liberate the suffering other. The Dominican friar in his own words speaks of conversion in similar manner, «*La conversion, c'est le retournement du coeur, le passage du repli sur soi à l'ouverture à l'Autre (Dieu et les hommes confondus), de la possession au partage, de la richesse à la pauvreté.*»<sup>769</sup> This understanding of the other, as the face of the infinite, calls indeed for a veritable interior conversation. The result is hospitality to the other, "a sacred hospitality" to borrow Massignon's title. At the *Maison d'Abraham*, de Beaurecueil finds no contradiction between his exclusive belief in Jesus of Nazareth and the practice of an unconditional hospitality in his name. The guest is a messenger of God, and the most striking model of hospitality comes from Massignon's keen reading of Abraham, the patriarch, who welcomed the three mysterious strangers who visited him in the desert. God comes to us in the person of a guest, but are not Christians themselves guests of Christ in God, to paraphrase Kenneth Cragg.<sup>770</sup> Massignon's treatment of hospitality has multiple roots: first, his experience entitled "visitation of the Stranger," second, his firm belief in the mystical substitution (*badaliyya*), third, his interpretation of the three prayers of Abraham and lastly, the patriarch's perfect hospitality offered to his three mysterious visitors. Massignon's and de Beaurecueil's theologies of hospitality are "a rethinking of Christianity nourished by Islam, [which] presents itself as a religion, an ethics, and a culture of hospitality,"<sup>771</sup> to

<sup>769</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 23.

<sup>770</sup> Cragg, "The Hinge and the Lock," 269.

<sup>771</sup> Derrida, *Acts*, 365.

borrow Derrida's brilliant phrase. Massignon writes, "With hospitality, we find the Sacred at the center of our destinies' mystery, like secret and divine alms (...) This mystery touches the very bottom of the mystery of the Trinity, where God is at once Guest [*Hôte*], Host [*Hospitalier*] and Home [*Foyer*]." <sup>772</sup> A full treatment of Massignon's writing on hospitality and Derrida's exquisite paper on "Hospitality," which combines deconstruction language with a tribute to Massignon's insight, are both beyond the scope of this section. <sup>773</sup> Our intention is to link Lévinas's view of the face of the other as the face of the infinite to the practice of hospitality. For de Beaurecueil, *Le partage du pain et du sel*, is the sacramental expression of hospitality, the ultimate ethical praxis, «*le geste prophétique par excellence.*» <sup>774</sup>

To return to Lévinas, ethics is not only the ideal place to encounter the Absolute but also ethics is inseparable from religion. «*La relation éthique, impossible sans justice, ne prépare pas seulement à la vie religieuse, ne découle pas seulement de cette vie, mais est déjà cette vie même.*» <sup>775</sup> The other in his or her vulnerability reveals the face of the widow, the orphan and the sojourner or stranger in the Bible and the Qur'ān. The subject realizes that there is something beyond, a limit to his or her conscious effort to assimilate the other. «*C'est là que le Transcendant, infiniment Autre, nous sollicite et en appelle à nous.*» <sup>776</sup> Our encounter with the infinite happens within my relation to the other who demands justice. The essence of faith according to Lévinas lies in the subject's responsibility for and to the

<sup>772</sup> Massignon, *L'hospitalité*, 30; the quote is taken from Derrida, *Acts*, 373. The words in brackets are Derrida's own addition. *Hospitalier* is Derrida's neologism.

<sup>773</sup> For a full treatment on hospitality see *Testimonies*, ed. H. Mason, "The Three Prayers," 3 - 20; "Visitation of the Stranger," 39 - 42; also Desterman and Moncelon, *Massignon*, 6 - 63; Massignon, *L'hospitalité*; Derrida, *Acts*, 356 - 420. and *Of Hospitality*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>774</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Un Chrétien*, 103.

<sup>775</sup> Lévinas. *Totalité*, 7.

<sup>776</sup> Lévinas. *Totalité*, 50.

other, «*Le respect de l'étranger et la sanctification du nom de l'Eternel forment une étrange égalité. Et tout le reste est lettre morte.*»<sup>777</sup>

The self is therefore called into question by the other that cannot be reduced to the same, and by something that escapes the cognitive power of the subject. Thus ethics as defined by Lévinas is “the putting into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other (*autrui*).”<sup>778</sup> Ethics for Lévinas is the critical putting into question of my liberty and my ego insatiable need to reduce all otherness to itself. Ethics is the location of a point of otherness or what Lévinas calls ‘exteriority’, that is irreducible to self. The exterior other is the face or the possibility of infinity. The face is the way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of “the other in me.”<sup>779</sup> Lévinas’s critical reading of the western philosophical tradition establishes a dualism of ‘same and other.’ In the face to face encounter, my responsibility to the other constitutes a “surplus of responsibility.”<sup>780</sup> Hence, substitution is not self pity or compassion, but a putting of oneself in the place of the other by taking responsibility for their responsibilities. My encounter with *le visage* or *l'autrui* or *le prochain* goes beyond comprehension, and this relationship cannot be viewed as a theme or a concept. “Ethics is not reducible to epistemology; practical reason is not reducible to pure reason.”<sup>781</sup> In this sense, the other is revealed in the vulnerability of the face and the nakedness of the body. The face commands because in its vulnerability it reveals the asymmetry of the relationship between same and other, by which Lévinas means that my existence is submitted to the ethical priority of the other. The face to face encounter is an epiphany, a movement of the exterior infinity to the same. The face of the other is not just

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<sup>777</sup> Lévinas. *Quatre lectures talmudiques* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 2005), 61.

<sup>778</sup> Lévinas, *Totality*, 43.

<sup>779</sup> Lévinas, *Totality*, 50.

<sup>780</sup> Lévinas, *Otherwise*, 100.

<sup>781</sup> Critchley, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge*, 11.

seen and therefore known; rather it challenges the very capacity to know, and so to appropriate it to the same.

Beneath the complexity of Lévinas's thought, there is a basic intuition. "In whatever I do and say I am faced by other persons who put my self-sufficiency into question."<sup>782</sup> Out of this basic insight, he develops a phenomenology of the other different from Husserl's account of same and other. "What Lévinas tries to establish is a fundamentally different way of thinking, based not on the workings of intentional consciousness but on the primordial *ethical* experience of human subjectivity."<sup>783</sup> He resists any attempt to establish a relation modeled on the classic form of the Socratic symmetrical dialogue between two subjects. Lévinas objects to Socratic dialogue because it would be to presume that, however different two subjects or two terms of a relation may be "they can ultimately be rendered commensurable and simultaneous, the same, contained in a history that totalizes time into a beginning or an end, or both, which is presence."<sup>784</sup> As Critchley puts it "Lévinas maintains a methodological but not a substantive commitment to Husserlian phenomenology."<sup>785</sup> In *Adieu to Emmanuel Lévinas*, Derrida does not see a radical asymmetry between self and other but he refers to Lévinas's idea of 'le tiers' «*la justice est cette présence du tiers.*»<sup>786</sup> The third person or '*le tiers*' limits and breaks the radical asymmetry between self and other by imposing the idea of justice on the relationship of self and other.<sup>787</sup>

Lévinas's account of the other enables him to defend subjectivity and establish a non-totalizing account of alterity. Ricoeur notes correctly that, for Lévinas, the face of the other is that of "a master of justice, of a master who instructs and who does so only in the

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<sup>782</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 72.

<sup>783</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 73.

<sup>784</sup> Richard A. Cohen, *Face to Face with Lévinas*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 19.

<sup>785</sup> Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge*, 9.

<sup>786</sup> Derrida, *Adieu*, 61.

<sup>787</sup> Derrida, *Adieu*, 60 - 61.

ethical mode: this face forbids murder and commands justice.”<sup>788</sup> But does Lévinas ask too much of the self and too little of the other? There seems to be something unacceptable in his Dostoevskian sense of responsibility “no one can substitute himself for me, who substitutes myself for all.”<sup>789</sup> In a critical dialogue with Lévinas, Derrida notes that Lévinas uses ontological discourse to overcome Heidegger’s totalizing ontology. In other words, Lévinas employs the language of the tradition in order to deconstruct it. He uses Husserl to reverse Husserl, and ontological language to deconstruct Heidegger. Derrida asks “can one both step outside the language of tradition, in order to critique tradition, and develop a different way of thinking about tradition, in order to take it in another direction?”<sup>790</sup>

Critchley summarizes the dilemma faced by all critical readers of a given tradition:

There are certain necessities within philosophical discourse which all philosophers, Lévinas and Derrida included, are obliged to face... As the sources of metaphysical discourse are the only ones that are available, one must continue to use them even when trying to promote their displacement.<sup>791</sup>

Ricoeur’s reading of Lévinas faces a similar issue, but the former does not wish to displace the latter but rather to amend Lévinas’s “radical dissymmetry of the face-to-face encounter.”

## ***II Beyond Lévinas***

Lévinas’s reading of otherness and Ricoeur’s answer constitutes the nexus of this chapter. Barnes explains , “[Ricoeur] . . . seeks to avoid the dualism – same and other – by

<sup>788</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself*, 189.

<sup>789</sup> Lévinas likes to quote Dostoevsky’s account of the asymmetry of guilt and responsibility to the other. He often quotes the famous statement of Aloysa Karamazov, “every one of us is guilty before all, for everyone and everything, and I am more than others.” Lévinas, *Otherwise*, 136.

<sup>790</sup> Derrida, *Writing*, trans. Alan Bass, 142. According to Derrida, Lévinas’s opposition to Heidegger simply reproduces Heidegger’s language, Lévinas ‘only confirms Heidegger in his discourse.’ However, Richard Cohen remarks that Derrida ignores Lévinas’s fundamental ethical concern. Lévinas is already aware that the underlying issue is to do with language, is borne out of the shift Lévinas makes from the residual ontological language of *Totality and Infinity* to the more deconstructive approach of *Otherwise than Being*. See Cohen *Elevations*, 305 – 31.

<sup>791</sup> Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 14 - 15.

placing the negotiation within a more complex and primordial otherness, namely the history, the language, and the culture within which the subject is formed.”<sup>792</sup> Lévinas’s philosophy focuses on the radical exteriority of the other and the inescapable and infinite responsibility of the self before the face of the other. “With Lévinas,” writes Ricoeur, “the face singularizes the commandment: it is in each case for the first time that the Other, a particular Other, says to me: ‘Thou shall not kill.’”<sup>793</sup> De Beaurecueil’s Kabul experience at the *Maison d’ Abraham* reflects that point of view. He was ‘hostage’ by choice and compelled for religious and ethical reasons to be responsible and hospitable to the religious and cultural other. The motives of his actions might not have been all pure, but history testifies to a praxis which attended to the vulnerable, the “little ones” of the Gospel. The initiative of the suffering other establishes and elevates an ethical demand, which Ricoeur calls, “the assignment of responsibility by the voice of the other.”<sup>794</sup> Lévinas’s thought, however, seems to neglect the influence of the other on the self. We turn to Ricoeur for a full understanding of the dialectics between the self and the other. In speaking of his experience in Kabul, de Beaurecueil characterizes the dialectics of his encounter in religious terms, «*Je souhaite que tous ceux que j’ai rencontrés depuis ma venue à Kaboul et moi-même, nous nous soyons convertis ensemble, chacun aidant l’autre peut-être en silence, à s’ouvrir davantage à la Lumière, à l’Amour.*»

A short introduction to Ricoeur’s life and thought sets the stage for our discussion.<sup>795</sup> Ricoeur was an impressive and complex 20<sup>th</sup> century continental philosopher and theologian, unusual in both the breadth and depth of his scholarship. His work is

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<sup>792</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 98.

<sup>793</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself*, 336.

<sup>794</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself*, 190.

<sup>795</sup> This short introduction is taken from entries on Ricoeur’s life and scholarship in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*; *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

essentially concerned with the grand theme of philosophy: the meaning of life or “who am I and how should I live,” or “the who, why or what of human action.” His philosophy is driven by the desire to provide an account that will do justice to the tensions and ambiguities which makes us human, and which underpin our fallibility. His constant preoccupation was with the hermeneutics of self, fundamental to which is the need we have for our lives to be made intelligible to us.<sup>796</sup> Ricoeur’s seminal contribution is his narrative theory and hermeneutics of text.<sup>797</sup> In addition, a key dialectic that runs through his entire corpus is the dialectic of same and other. We rely largely on his book, *Oneself as another*. According to Jon van den Hengel, the book “explores the semantic of action, the pragmatic of action, ascription of action, the mimesis of action in narrative, ethical and political praxis, and the practical wisdom.”<sup>798</sup> Ricoeur is a traditional continental philosopher in the sense that his work is highly systematic and steeped in classical Western philosophy. He is indebted to Aristotle, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger, to name but a few. His reflective philosophy is one that considers the most fundamental philosophical problems to concern self-understanding. While he retains subjectivity at the heart of philosophy, his is no abstraction Cartesian-style subject; the subject is always a situated subject, an embodied being anchored in a name and dated in a physical, historical, and social world. For these reasons, his work is sometime described as philosophical anthropology. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur proposes a middle path between the exalted subject of the Cartesian tradition and humiliated and shattered ego of the deconstructionist and the masters of suspicion, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. John van den Hengel, s.j., says it perfectly:

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<sup>796</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself*, 16 - 26.

<sup>797</sup> See the following books: *The Conflict of Interpretation; Interpretation Theory, Time and Narrative* in 3 vols. *Hermeneutics of Human Sciences*.

<sup>798</sup> John van den Hengel, “Paul Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another* and Practical Theology,” *Theological Studies*, 55 (1994): 462.



Ricoeur believes in the clashes of interpretation, in metaphorical twists, that battle towards new meaning. In pitting the Cartesian tradition of the transcendental ego, where the I as consciousness is absolute ground, against the deconstructionist tradition, where the subject is only a linguistic or rhetorical flourish, Ricoeur wants to act as a midwife. Both of these traditions, he tells us, are children with an ancient ancestry. The ancestors of this conflict are Plato and Aristotle and their articulation of the primordial antinomy of Self and Other.<sup>799</sup>

Furthermore, Ricoeur affirms that our self-understanding, and indeed history itself, are subjected to the productive effect of the imagination through interpretation. The human subjectivity for Ricoeur is primarily linguistically designated and mediated by symbols. The problematic of existence is given in language and must be worked out in language and discourse.<sup>800</sup> Ricoeur refers to his hermeneutic method as a “hermeneutics of suspicion” because discourse both reveals and conceals something about the nature of being. Unlike other post-structuralists such as Foucault and Derrida for whom subjectivity is nothing more than an effect of language, Ricoeur anchors subjectivity in the human body and the material world, of which language is a kind of second order articulation. In the face of the fragmentation and alienation of post-modernity, Ricoeur offers his narrative theory as the path to a unified and meaningful life.<sup>801</sup> Ricoeur is important to our endeavor. Not only does de Beaurecueil’s knowledge of self need the Afghan other, but the narrative of his life gives meaning to time. «*Le temps devient humain dans la mesure seulement où il est articulé de manière narrative.*»<sup>802</sup> It is in the narrative of de Beaurecueil’s life that history makes sense and the Kabul experience finds meaning. The connection that Ricoeur draws between human experience in time and the function of the narrative<sup>803</sup> shows that without a

<sup>799</sup> Hengel, “Paul Ricoeur’s Oneself as Another ...,” 460.

<sup>800</sup> “Paul Ricoeur,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 11 - 13. See “Self and Narrative Identity,” in *Oneself*, 140 - 168.

<sup>801</sup> See, Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, (3 vols.) trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990).

<sup>802</sup> Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, vol. 1, (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 17.

<sup>803</sup> “Paul Ricoeur,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 15 - 17.

narrative, human life is similar to the sound of a fallen tree in the forest that no one hears.

The present study is a narrative of the Dominican friar's search for self and encounter with the other, and only this narrative is capable of representing his human experience of time.

Maybe the issue of selfhood as explained by Ricoeur shows the acumen of a philosophical treatment of the friar's journey. How did the Dominican friar understand himself in the midst of Afghans? What was his self consciousness? Selfhood is important to the dialectics of self and other, and essentially involves an active grasp of oneself as a "who," that is, as a person who is the subject of a concrete situation, a situation characterized by material and phenomenal qualities. This means understanding oneself as a named person with a time and place of birth, linked to other similarly named persons and to certain ethical and cultural traditions, living in a dated and named place. Therefore, all knowledge including my knowledge of my own existence, is mediated and thus, calls for interpretation. This also means that self-understanding can never be grasped by the kind of introspective immediacy celebrated by Descartes. Thus "who I am" is not an objective fact to be discovered, but rather something that I must achieve or create, and to which I must attest. The ability to grasp oneself as a concrete subject of such a world requires a complex mode of understanding capable of integrating discourses of quite heterogeneous kinds, including, importantly, different orders of time. It is to the temporal dimension of selfhood that Ricoeur has most directly addressed his hermeneutic philosophy and narrative model of understanding.

For Ricoeur, the self is always in need of interpretation and the other serves that purpose. He sees same and other in a hermeneutical dialogue. "Self does not know self directly but through the act of self attestation in the face of experiences of passivity or

alterity.”<sup>804</sup> Unlike Descartes’s cogito, or Hesserl’s transcendental idealism, Ricoeur maintains that the self is known through the mediation of experiences and interpretation. He wants to allow for the ethical primacy of the other over the self, but at the same time he seeks to avoid the extreme perspective to which he feels Lévinas’s position tends, risking the “substitution of the self-hatred for the self-esteem.”<sup>805</sup> In setting the same over and against the other, Ricoeur argues, Lévinas fails to allow for any process of self-differentiation in the middle. “In the self-attestation ‘Here I am’, it becomes a responsible witness before the other.”<sup>806</sup> Finally, Ricoeur makes a virtue of necessity by arguing that selfhood can only be understood in dialectical relationship with a range of experiences of otherness. Ricoeur’s conception of ethics is directly tied to his conception of the narrative self. Because selfhood is something that must be achieved and something that must be dependent upon the regard, words and actions of others, as well as chancy material conditions. He describes the ethical perspective that arises from this view of the subject as “aiming at the good life with and for others, in just institutions.”<sup>807</sup> What can better define the ideal of the *Maison d’Abraham* than this line of Ricoeur?

According to Ricoeur, Lévinas’s relentless insistence on the asymmetrical nature of ethical relationship runs the risks of making any relationship to the other difficult and even impossible. ‘Same’ and ‘other’ are kept in a state of constant passivity. He remarks that “Lévinas’s entire philosophy rests on the initiative of the other in the intersubjectivity relation. In reality, this initiative establishes no relation at all, to the extent that the other represents absolute exteriority with respect to an ego defined by the condition of separation.

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<sup>804</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 100.

<sup>805</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself*, 168.

<sup>806</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 101.

<sup>807</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself*, 172.

The other, in a sense, absolves itself of any relation.”<sup>808</sup> Unlike Lévinas, Ricoeur insists that the very concept of otherness implies that there is some relation already established which enables the use of the language of difference in the first place. He presses on, “Would the self be a result if it were not first a presupposition, that is, potentially capable of hearing this assignment?”<sup>809</sup> Ricoeur objects to Lévinas’s concern to maintain asymmetric relationship which allows no reciprocity. He refuses to let the other remain always exterior. He believes such an initiative established no relation at all. Ricoeur begins with a self which is summoned by the face or voice of the other, and sees a need to set such a call for justice not over and against the struggle of the same for recognition, but within the search for self, for an authentic living of the ‘ethical intention.’

To be certain, Ricoeur’s approach to the other is in conversation with Lévinas’s ethics as first philosophy. The former makes rather a positive move and tries to reconcile ontology, epistemology and ethics but take seriously the following questions: how to speak of the epiphany of the face to face encounter without creating another totality is the real challenge that Lévinas brings to theologians and philosophers alike. How does one recognize what is other without already having some idea of otherness? This latter fundamental question demands, in our view, a philosophical approach. Lévinas tries to show how the act of responsibility before the face of the other can describe a relation to what lies beyond essence, beyond something other in me. The responsibility of the self is always subject to the other. To be fair, there is an intrinsic coherence to Lévinas’s thought, the other is not just different but the other resists all reduction to the same. The other is the face of the infinite, or in the Cartesian language adopted by Lévinas, the otherness of the

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<sup>808</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself*, 188 - 9.

<sup>809</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred* trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mark I. Wallace, (Minneapolis, MI: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 126.

person is the encounter with infinity. Lévinas speaks of ‘the epiphany of the face to face encounter’ in ethical terms as the other (*autrui*) who confronts or challenges me. But according to Barnes, Ricoeur helps push the question further: “The question, however, is whether [Lévinas’s] project allows him to defend subjectivity and establish a non-totalizing account of alterity, or whether it just leaves him locked within the polarities of same and other?”<sup>810</sup>

There is no doubt that the other is always other than something or someone else. But, self and other are necessarily relational categories; they cannot be reified or understood apart from each other but exist in relationship. To speak in terms of self and other as relational categories means that that which is taken to be other can never be left unexamined. In accord with Lévinas, Ricoeur admits that the subject is called to responsibility before the other. Ricoeur takes Lévinas’s ethical view seriously but objects to Lévinasian’s radical dualism –same and other. Barnes asserts that “Ricoeur provides not just an important critique of Lévinas’s insistence that the other is always exterior, beyond the totality of what can be encompassed by thought, but a theoretical basis for the practices of negotiation and hospitality.”<sup>811</sup> Unlike Barnes, we would suggest that Ricoeur expands or stretches Lévinas’s view more than criticizes him. Lévinas would stand by his call for infinite responsibility to and for the other, but he would admit that the reciprocity issue is solely the business of the other person and needs not to concern the self. Ricoeur seeks to liberate Lévinas’s ethics from its sustained confrontation with ontology. Ricoeur closes the debate:

Let us attempt, in conclusion, to take an overview of the entire range of attitudes deployed between the two extremes of the summons to responsibility, where the initiative comes from the other, and of sympathy for the suffering other, where the

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<sup>810</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 97.

<sup>811</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 105.

initiative comes from the loving self, friendship appearing as a midpoint where the self and the other share equally the same wish to live together. While equality is presupposed in friendship, in the case of the injunction coming from the other, equality is reestablished only through the recognition by the self of the superiority of the other's authority; in the case of sympathy that comes from self and extends to the other, equality is reestablished only through the shared admission of fragility and, finally, of mortality.

De Beaurecueil adheres to the idea that humans are utterly reliant upon each other, mutually vulnerable, and the fate of each is tied up with the fate of others. We have an indebtedness to each other, a duty to care for each other and engender self-respect and justice, all of which are necessary to the creation and preservation of self-esteem. While duty runs deep it is nevertheless preceded by a certain reciprocity. In order to feel commanded by duty, one must first have the capacity to hear and respond to the demand of the other. Prior to duty there must be a basic reciprocity, which underlies our mutual vulnerability from which duty, as well as the possibility of friendship and justice, arise. Ricoeur emphasizes the ethical primacy of acting and suffering. He notes, "From the suffering Other there comes a giving that is no longer drawn from the power of acting and existing, but precisely from weakness itself."<sup>812</sup> The suffering other is unable to act but gives to he or she who shares this suffering, the knowledge of their shared vulnerability. Hence, love and understanding of others, and love and understanding of self are two sides of the same coin. Humans become who they are through others; so friendship and justice become the cardinal virtues in the wellbeing of selfhood.<sup>813</sup> John van den Hengel summarizes Ricoeur's contribution, "The other as another 'flesh,' another 'I' (Husserl), or as radical exteriority (Lévinas), is transformed in Ricoeur's philosophy into a self of reciprocity and dialogue."<sup>814</sup> De Beaurecueil's attempt to love and understand the Afghan

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<sup>812</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself*, 190.

<sup>813</sup> Ricoeur, *Onself*, 190 - 91; see also "Self and the Ethical Aim," in *Oneself*, 169 - 202.

<sup>814</sup> Hengel, "Paul Ricoeur's Onself as Another ...," 468.

other, the Muslim other, became a journey of his own self-understanding. For example, the sudden and tragic death of Ghaffār transformed his Eucharistic theology, the incarceration and torture suffered by some of his protégés during the civil war challenged his responsibility and role, and broke his dream to live in Kabul the rest of his life. These transformative experiences of the self through the eyes of the other deepened his sense of the unfathomable providence of God.

This chapter attempts to find a philosophical language capable of rendering de Beaucueuil's human and religious experience of otherness. As noted earlier, his experience was an encounter of 'two othernesses,' and a journey of misunderstandings, joy and tragedy, all the ingredients of hospitality given and received, and of religious and cultural others 'knowing each other' in the Qur'ānic sense of the phrase. Through this encounter both parties become a place of interpretation for each other, a place where radical exteriority of the other finds itself in a dialectics of reciprocity, justice and friendship. The self that emerges by hearing and answering the other's plea to responsibility and hospitality is a liberated self free to live in the generosity of God. In reference to Lévinas's thought, Critchley correctly remarks:

Now, it is to be hoped that it goes without saying that the achievement of such an ethical relation with the other person is not just a task for philosophy, but it is a philosophical task, namely to understand what we might call the moral grammar of everyday life and to try and teach that grammar. The other person is not simply a step on the philosopher's ladder to metaphysical truth. And perhaps the true source of wonder with which, as Aristotle claimed, philosophy begins, is not to be found by staring into the starry heavens, but by looking into another's eyes, for here is more palpable infinity than can ever exhaust one's curiosity.<sup>815</sup>

Ricoeur sees the significance of the other for the self, while Lévinas insists on an infinite responsibility for and to the other. Nicolas Antenat quotes Lévinas:

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<sup>815</sup> Critchley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge*, 27.

*À la question: «Mais l'autre n'est-il pas responsable de moi?» Levinas répond: «Je suis responsable d'autrui sans attendre de réciprocité, dût-il m'en coûter la vie. La réciprocité, c'est son affaire. C'est précisément dans la mesure où entre autrui et moi la relation n'est pas réciprocité, que je suis sujet à autrui; et je suis 'sujet' essentiellement en ce sens [...]. Le moi a toujours une responsabilité de plus que tous les autres.»<sup>816</sup>*

The face of the other, who summons me to responsibility and forbids murder, is the face of the infinite which demands a response and invites one to reciprocity and intersubjectivity.

De Beaurecueil is largely the product of a chosen estrangement, a willingness to be the 'hostage' to the face of the other. The children of the *Maison d'Abraham* and Lycée Isteqlāl, his Afghan and French friends and neighbors constitute the hermeneutical circle of his self-understanding. He receives from them the gift of an authentic guest who becomes a host. In other words, the experience of shared hospitality between a host and a guest becomes the testament of his life, and to borrow Maurice Zundel's magnificent line «*On ne peut être quelqu'un que pour quelqu'un.*»<sup>817</sup> Finally, our attempt to borrow Lévinas's and Ricoeur's philosophy must not undermine a fundamental humility which forces us to leave open the philosophical question whether or not the other who endebts or enjoins the self is real Other or an empty place. Ricoeur ends his book on a sobering note:

Perhaps the philosopher as philosopher has to admit that one does not know and cannot say whether this Other, the source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God—living God, absent God—or an empty place. With this oporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end.<sup>818</sup>

Ricoeur's "oporia of the Other" underscores the mystery of the face of the Other. Levinas's ethical demand "opens the partners without limit towards that Infinite horizon of their being which is God."<sup>819</sup> It is no wonder that de Beaurecueil saw in the face of the other,

<sup>816</sup> Quoted by Anténat, «Respect et Vulnérabilité chez Levinas», *Le Portique*, 17.

<sup>817</sup> Zundel, *Je est un autre*, 24.

<sup>818</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself*, 355.

<sup>819</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 254.



particularly that of a suffering child, the face of “one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine” found in the Christian scriptures, (Matthew. 25:31 - 46) or the face of the widow, the orphan and the stranger found in the Hebrew scriptures and the Qur’ān. The philosophical language borrowed from Lévinas and Ricoeur makes intelligible this mystical encounter. Borrowing from Barnes, such an encounter is first, “ a response to that dialogue which God initiates,” second, “a response to the otherness of God who alone can enable the other to speak,” and finally, “an ethical meeting of persons and as much a moment of God’s self-revelation as liturgy and prayer.”<sup>820</sup>

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<sup>820</sup> Barnes, *Theology*, 254.

## *Conclusion*

### Initial

Out of infinite longings rise  
 finite deeds like weak fountains  
 falling back just in time and trembling.  
 And yet, what otherwise remains silent,  
 our happy energies—show themselves  
 in these dancing tears.  
 Rainer Maria Rilke (trans. Cliff Crego)<sup>821</sup>

### A Walk

Already my gaze is upon the hill, the sunny one,  
 at the end of the path which I have only just begun.  
 So we are grasped, by that which we could not grasp,  
 at such great distance, so fully manifest  
 and it changes us, even when we do not reach it,  
 into something that, hardly sensing it, we already are;  
 a sign appears, echoing our own sign ...  
 But what we sense is the falling winds.  
 Rainer Maria Rilke (trans. Cliff Crego)<sup>822</sup>

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<sup>821</sup> <http://picture-poems.com/rilke/> (consulted on November 23, 2010).

<sup>822</sup> <http://picture-poems.com/rilke/uncollected.html> (consulted on November 23, 2010).

In *Doing the Truth in Love*, Michael Himes confesses, “theology: that of which we cannot speak.”<sup>823</sup> As Himes understands it, theologians and mystics stand between two poles. The first one is expressed in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s conclusion in *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, “Of that about which we can say nothing, let us keep silent,”<sup>824</sup> and the second one is T. S. Eliot’s remark, “There are some things about which nothing can be said and before which we dare not keep silence.”<sup>825</sup> De Beaurecueil tries all his life long to square this theological circle: live an authentic Roman Catholic religious life in the midst of Muslims.<sup>826</sup> It seems that he stands remarkably well between those two poles as a mystic and a prophet. According to William Ernest Hocking:

The prophet is but a mystic in control of the forces of history, declaring their necessary outcome: the mystic in action is the prophet. In the prophet, the cognitive certainty becomes historic and particular; and this is the necessary destiny of that certainty: mystic experience must complete itself in prophetic consciousness.<sup>827</sup>

The interplay of mystical and prophetic elements are found in the lives of several outstanding Dominican friars, and de Beaurecueil belongs to this lineage.<sup>828</sup> In the examples of these friars, the essential unknowability of God embraces the imperative of a loving ministry. The life and religious praxis of de Beaurecueil is congruent with the Dominican tradition and spirituality, which necessarily includes: prayer and study, material and spiritual poverty, the primacy of Truth and contemplation expressed in active service to others. This latter aspect known as *Contemplata aliis tradere* (to hand on to others what has been contemplated) is the *praxis mystica* of a Dominican friar. Wood explains:

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<sup>823</sup> Michael Himes, *Doing Truth in Love* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 83.

<sup>824</sup> Quoted in Himes, *Doing the Truth*, 84.

<sup>825</sup> Quoted in Himes, *Doing the Truth*, 84.

<sup>826</sup> He was called among other things «*Un fou de Dieu parmi les Musulmans*.»

<sup>827</sup> William Ernest Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience* (New Haven: Yale, 1952), 511.

<sup>828</sup> See the biographies of three Dominicans: Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart and Catherine of Siena, who embodied these mystical and prophetic elements. Richard Woods, *Mysticism and Prophecy: The Dominican Tradition* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998).

Drawn from the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, the gnomic phrase [*Contemplata aliis tradere*] is meant not to distinguish the mystical, contemplative dimension of Dominican spirituality from its active expression, but to unite them. Nor are they related as a means to an end: they form one goal.<sup>829</sup>

The five chapters of this study have examined the spiritual and intellectual encounter of two mystics who lived centuries apart in totally different cultures, religious traditions and continents. The scholarship of a contemporary Dominican friar about the life and works of a Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Herāt is the thrust of this dissertation. This study shows the invaluable (and yet neglected) contribution of de Beaurecueil to the Dominican tradition of Islamic studies and offers a luminous meditation on a mystical approach to the religious other. On the one hand, de Beaurecueil's life is a faith journey lived from the location of weakness, otherness and a constant effort to understand his faith in light of the religious other. On the other, his life was the locus of Christian-Muslim theological conundrums. He lived every aspects of the challenges, differences and incompatibilities of the two faith traditions.<sup>830</sup> According to Christian Duquoc (d. 2008) there are four major challenges of Islam to Christianity: 1) The advent of Islam as a post-Christian religion justifies its claim to be the last historical revealed religion; 2) The radical monotheism of Islam rejects the incarnation of the biblical God in history; 3) The dogmatic and moral simplicity of Islam breaks with the complexity of Christian doctrines; 4)

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<sup>829</sup> Wood, *Mysticism*, 25. The classical reference is, "For even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so it is better to give to others what has been contemplated than merely to contemplate." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 188. For more on Dominican spirituality see: Anselm Townsend, *Dominican Spirituality*, (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, Co., 1934); Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ways of the Spiritual Life* (Rockford, IL: TAN-Books, 1977); Benedict Ashley, *The Dominicans* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990); *Thomas Aquinas: The Gifts of the Spirit: Selected Spiritual Writings*, ed. Benedict Ashley, trans. Matthew Rzeckowski (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996). Oliver Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1991).

<sup>830</sup> Mahmoud Ayoub and Thomas Michel in their respective books, *A Muslim View of Christianity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2007) and *A Christian View of Islam* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010) give readers a full treatment of the theological incompatibilities, the mystical affinities, and pastoral possibilities and examples of the complexities and opportunities of Muslim-Christian relations and lived experiences. They present an accurate view of what it means to live a Christian discipleship among Muslims or vice versa.

Modernity: individual versus community: a controversial challenge.<sup>831</sup> Duquoc suggests that these challenges are not assaults on Christianity but rather deeply disturbing questions to wrestle with. In an odd way, these challenges are the gifts of the Muslim other to Christian theological and mystical imagination. This study offers an example of how a Dominican mystic and an erudite orientalist appropriated this gift of the religious other. De Beaurecueil offers an approach which could energized a Roman Catholic theology of religions out of stamina and rekindle “Christian-Muslim dialogue in a world gone religiously awry” as David Burrell puts it.<sup>832</sup>

The narratives of both Anṣārī’s and de Beaurecueil’s lives in the first two chapters shed light upon the complex reasons and circumstantial events at the roots of the friar’s scholarship, his journey from Aristocratic Catholic France to Cairo and to the mountains of Afghanistan where he lived his Christian discipleship and Dominican life. In addition, these biographies present the eventful life of a Ṣūfī master and paint the pictures of two deeply religious men whose lives transcend time and defy incommensurable differences. These first two chapters also till the soil for the spiritual affinities and the master-disciple relationships. Chapter three and four focus on de Beaurecueil’s own intellectual and mystical growth, his *via illuminativa* and *unitiva*. His *praxis mystica* emulates Jesus of Nazareth’s prophethood and servanthood. The final chapter betrays the author’s intellectual inclinations and proposes a philosophical language to probe a mystical encounter. De Beaurecueil’s example confirms that the ethical demand offers the possibility to experience the Absolute and to answer the call of the other who symbolized the widow, the orphan and the stranger of the Bible and the Qur’ān. In the encounter with the face of the other, the self

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<sup>831</sup> Duquoc, «Défis de l’islam au christianisme,» ([http:// biblio.domuni.eu/articlesreligions/journéesromaines/islam-01.htm](http://biblio.domuni.eu/articlesreligions/journéesromaines/islam-01.htm) (visited November 30, 2010))

<sup>832</sup> David Burrell, “Christian -Muslim Dialogue in a World Gone Religiously Awry” *MW* vol. 100 (2010): 414 – 30.

becomes aware of something infinite. This is where the Transcendent, utterly Other calls upon us and demands our action.

Furthermore, these two men of God offer a glimpse into the mystical legacy of their respective faith traditions.<sup>833</sup> Their lives call to mind Rabindranath Tagore's awesome poem: "Little Flute,"

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.  
This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.  
At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.  
Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.<sup>834</sup>

The two mystics teach us that what is most universal is at the same time most particular. Hegel called this phenomenon "the concrete universal."<sup>835</sup> The concrete universal is a principle that necessarily has universal import and at the same time is concrete by virtue of historical situation. Mysticism is of this nature since it belongs to all religious traditions and every mystical path (*ṭarīqa*) is tied to a particular moment, an age and even a person. There are what one might call moments of mystical paths in history. One could also borrow the title of Fakhr al-dīn 'Irāqī's book and call these moments "divine flashes"<sup>836</sup> or again T.S. Eliot's luminous phrase, "a raid on the inarticulate,"<sup>837</sup> characterizes accurately the lives of Anṣārī and de Beaurecueil. It is not far-fetched to think of them as moments of mystical paths. Both mystics were expressions of the universal human search for union with God

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<sup>833</sup> Morelon pays homage to the two mystics in these terms, «Serge de Beaurecueil (1917 – 2005) et 'Abdullāh Anṣārī (1006 – 1089): deux mystiques: une belle connivence.» *MIDEO* 27 (2008): 4.

<sup>834</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, (BookSurge, 2003), 2. See <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/tagore/gitnjali.htm> (access on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010)

<sup>835</sup> Georg Wilhelm Frederich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 397.

<sup>836</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm 'Irāqī, *Divine Flashes. The Classics of Western Spirituality*, trans. William C. Chittick and Peter Lamborn Wilson (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

<sup>837</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*, 16.

and also of complete obedience to the divine path in their particular religious tradition. They were among those who took seriously their religious traditions and fully understood the status of humanity as standing before God. “Be still and know that I am God,” we read in Psalm 46:10.<sup>838</sup>

The Dominican friar refused to buy into the dichotomies of knowledge and experience and practice. His life shows that knowledge of God is experience of God and experience per force into practice. Evelyn Underhill, in her notable book on the literature of mysticism, notes that “the Mystic way is the awakening, purification and training of the self in its ascent of the path which leads to the blessedness of the Unitive life.”<sup>839</sup> Reza Shah-Kazemi goes further and identifies in Islamic spirituality or mysticism the dimension that prevents religion from becoming mere ideology and turning into violence. He argues that the vital state of religious life and discourse is proportional to the profound spiritual consciousness within its fold. He writes:

It is spirituality, we believe, that reveals, more effectively than any other aspect of the Islamic tradition, the reductionism inherent in the attempt to ideologize and politicize the message of the Qur’ān. For it is precisely when the spiritual appreciation of Revelation is weak, that its message becomes susceptible to ideological distortion. There is a clear relationship between the decline of spirituality and the rise of ideology, in Islam as in other religions; and it would not be going too far to say that, deprived of a living spirituality at its core, Islam will inevitably be reduced to an empty shell, the vacuum within soon becoming filled with worldliness in all its guises: its revealed text becomes an ideological pretext; morally reforming oneself gives way to violently rectifying the other; spiritual contemplation is scorned in favour of political machination; the subtleties of revelation become submerged by exigencies of revolution.<sup>840</sup>

<sup>838</sup> The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

<sup>839</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (London: Methuen, 1912), (covert page)

<sup>840</sup> Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2006), vii - ix. Eric Geoffroy shares Shah-Kazemi’s belief in the sense that for him the esoteric or spiritual aspect of Islam is the heart without which Islam withers. He believes that Western secularized and globalized world is in dire need of a soul, and the Muslim World must recover its genuine spiritual dimensions. The mystical dimensions of Islam and other faith traditions could provide a soul or in secular term to humanize our globalized world torn apart by religious strife and gross economic disparities. See *Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh: la sagesse des maîtres Sūfis*, trans. Eric Geoffroy (Paris: Grasset, 1998); Colloque international organisé par Eric Geoffroy (Département d’Arabe –UMB) la Bibliothèque d’Alexandrie (Egypte) du 18 au 21 Avril 2003.

Despite their human failures, one could argue these two mystics at the center of this study are like parables in Christian terms or *koans* in Zen Buddhism. Their lives are paths to truth because they lead our minds and eyes to see the extraordinary in the ordinary and dreadfulness of everyday life. They struggle, like Jacob against the angel of God in the Hebrew scripture, to embody a genuine path to the divine and an authentic taste of the unfathomable presence of God. De Beaurecueil's mystical perspective is a genuine investigation of the foundations of the philosophical and theological ground of both Christianity and Islam at a particular time. Such an endeavor avoids religious exclusion and alienation, and fosters a deeper appreciation of the gift of other religions. Faithful to the motto of the Dominican Order, *Veritas*, de Beaurecueil's lifetime search for the Truth is the blue print of this study. He remarks correctly *«Je ne crois pas posséder la Vérité que je pourrai, du haut de ma supériorité, dispenser aux autres. Je souhaite seulement, avec eux, souvent par eux, pas à pas, jour après jour, aller vers elle, afin que ce soit elle qui me possède.»*<sup>841</sup> *Veritas*, "Truth" inscribed in Dominican seal summarizes the goal and ideal of the Order. *Veritas* is not a narrow philosophical, much less semantic notion of verbal accuracy but it means the whole range of divine and human Reality. For Dominicans, the chief instance and perfect exemplar remains the Eternal Truth, expressed substantially and historically in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of faith.<sup>842</sup>

Mystics are often good examples of what the search for the ultimate Truth is all about. De Beaurecueil's life witnesses to a possibility of two faith traditions as well as two cultures and civilizations: Persian-Arabic and western European, learning, enriching and challenging each other without distorting and denigrating the other. The Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī, Anṣārī, lured the French Dominican priest to settle in Afghanistan for twenty years. De

<sup>841</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 24.

<sup>842</sup> Wood, *Mysticism*, 25.



Beaurecueil met Anṣārī on mystical ground. The Pīr of Herāt schooled the Frenchman through mystical experience of the unfathomable. His mystical path blossomed when he entered in conversation with the mystical writings of Anṣārī. The quality of the relationship between the Dominican friar and Anṣārī is strikingly similar to Massignon's description of his with al-Ḥallāj. Massignon writes, "Not that the study of his life [al-Ḥallāj], which was full and strong, upright and whole, rising and giving has yielded to me the secret of his heart. It is rather he [al-Ḥallāj] who has fathomed mine and who probes it still."<sup>843</sup> In this sense, al-Ḥallāj was for Massignon what Anṣārī was for de Beaurecueil. Similar to Massignon and many others, de Beaurecueil had opened a door for many to pass through and to find a real approach and technique of dialogue with the religious other. De Beaurecueil had transmitted Anṣārī's thought and mystical wisdom. The Dominican friar's life was a doorway and a finger pointing beyond himself and perhaps to what interfaith encounter really means.

De Beaurecueil enters in dialogue as a host or a guest without presumptions of knowledge or aspirations to possess the right faith tradition. Dialogue requires recognition of one's own limitations and sincere respect shown to others' difference. De Beaurecueil did not live in two worlds: Islam and Christianity, within himself there was not a wall dividing the one from the other. Interfaith dialogue engages us beyond ourselves and often includes the undertaking of apparently hopeless journeys made to and with distant friends. Dialogue witnesses to alternative human capacities such as compassion, moral integrity against brutality and indifference to suffering. The radical respect for the religious other shown by de Beaurecueil and many others is one of the most precious fruits of realized kindredness that began in dialogue. Genuine dialogue does not shy away from moral rage,

<sup>843</sup> Massignon, *The Passion*, trans. Herbert Mason, xv. See also Marie Louise Guge, *Louis Massignon: Crucible of Compassion* (Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1997). 112.

piercing oneself first before it is aimed at others. It may indeed be a necessary condition of the larger dialogue for such souls: rage on the other's behalf, rage for truth, rage for justice, in the self consuming spirit of compassion. These prophets of dialogue went further than most in discovering and sharing a larger worldview than their own.

*«Comme l'olivier vit dans la terre, Serge n'a jamais quitté la terre de l'enfance.*

*C'est d'elle qu'il a nourri et formé ses fruits. Il en a gardé la fantaisie, la liberté. Tout y est possible. »*<sup>844</sup> André Gouzes sees in de Beaurecueil's life the freedom and the care free

characters of a child. His unwavering determination to travel to a far away land and later abandon erudite scholarship for Kabul street children's welfare can harken back to his own childhood drama. Jacques Lacan's famous phrase *«l'enfant est le père de l'homme,»* seems to explain some aspects of his religious adventure. Pérennès argues that de Beaurecueil read closely Dostoevsky's work in which he paid a keen attention to the 'scandal of children's suffering and pain.' In 1954, he gave a lecture on *«Présence des enfants dans l'oeuvre de Dostoevsky»* to the *Alliance française* of Ismaïlīa in Cairo.<sup>845</sup> From *Crime and Punishment*, he took the following lines seriously: *«Les enfants sont l'image du Christ. C'est à eux qu'appartient le Royaume de Dieu! Il a ordonné de les respecter et de les aimer, ils sont l'humanité future.»*<sup>846</sup> His whole life was full of instances of extraordinary care for children in pain. At Saint-Fargeau, he ministered to children with poliomyelitis; in Cairo, he befriended Taïssir Tatio who was seriously handicapped and later took Alain-Ammanuel Tagher, a ten years old Lebanese boy, to Lourdes to pray for healing.<sup>847</sup> He was baffled by how children endured unbearable pain and yet radiated inexplicable joy. Here lies the

<sup>844</sup> Preface to de Beaurecueil, *Je crois*. 9.

<sup>845</sup> Pérennès, *«Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009, »* 7.

<sup>846</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and punishment*, t. 2, (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), 76. De Beaurecueil repeats the same lines in his interview with Ratiq Rahimi in the documentary movie, *Nous avons partagé*.

<sup>847</sup> Pérennès, *«Colloque Abbey de Sylvanès, October, 2009, »* 7.

source of his own joy and enthusiasm for children's welfare. In an article written on his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, he betrayed the secret of his inner joy which illuminates his care for the little ones among us. He wrote:

*Émerveillement? Parce que l'Étoile du matin n'a cessé de briller pour éclairer ma route, même dans les moments où la nuit était la plus noire. C'est souvent sur des visages d'enfants qu'elle a resplendi, icône de Jésus me révélant tout-à-coup Sa présence. Dieu 'rencontré' au tournant du chemin, Dieu 'déguisé' pour me surprendre et me laisser pantois devant l'éclat de Sa beauté. Dieu rayonnant dans le sourire de Jérôme, Dieu pétillant dans les yeux de Lawry,<sup>848</sup> Dieu meurtri, couvert de pustules sous les traits d'Olivier... Dieu ressemblant si peu à ce qu'on en dit, Dieu jouant à cache-cache, comme un gamin, pour le plaisir de nous surprendre, comme l'Étoile du matin, surgissant soudain dans la nuit. Rigolade? Devant les tours qu'Il m'a joués, me faisant cheminer parfois les yeux bandés, pour s'amuser de ma surprise. Je rêvais d'aller loin et j'ai été servi, bien au-delà de ce que je pouvais prévoir: dix-sept ans en Égypte, vingt en Afghanistan, sans compter le retour en catastrophe, à la case départ où d'autres aventures m'attendaient. Dieu d'humour et Dieu de tendresse, Dieu sachant rire et faire rire, quand on serait tenté de pleurer, Dieu de la Bonne Nouvelle, Dieu de la liberté. L'univers? Quel cirque magnifique, éclairé par les galaxies, où Dieu veut bien faire le clown, pour que tous les enfants du monde, y compris vous et moi, créés avec amour, à Son image et à Sa ressemblance, éclatent de Sa joie pour toujours.<sup>849</sup>*

One could even suggest that the Dominican friar shares with his master a similar childhood experience. Indeed, around the age of ten, Anṣārī's father left Herāt to return to his previous ascetic life in Balkh. Likewise, at the age of fourteen, de Beaurecueil's parents divorced. Both Anṣārī and de Beaurecueil shared a childhood experience of being abandoned and that might explain part of the friar's connection to his master. Nevertheless, one would be hard pressed to find an explicit reference in Beaurecueil's writings to such a connection. In the end, one can do no more than speculate about their childhood connection, and speculation is no ground for judgment. Thus, the evidence seems simply circumstantial and too thin to warrant further investigation. It is rather the mystical

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<sup>848</sup> Lawry Apcher-Mobard died a few months after de Beaurecueil did in July 2005. He was twenty one and has battled mucoviscidose all his life and often underwent long and painful hospitalization. Pérennès, «Colloque Abbaye de Sylvanès, October, 2009, » 7.

<sup>849</sup> De Beaurecueil, *Je crois*, 131 – 32.

affinities which are obvious in his entire life. Over half a century, de Beaurecueil's human, intellectual and spiritual journeys were a long walk to a promised land he could not imagine possible. However, the abrupt end of his Afghan journey underlines the utter fragility of every human dream. As it is so often the case, despite our intentions, none of us is the master of our own life trajectory. The unfathomable divine freedom explains it all. The path he trod remains unique and even though no other friar has followed his footsteps, his example is very compelling and his spiritual and intellectual journeys can be summarized as follows:

Nevertheless, I have made the attempt. I have done so because these persons captured my attention and fascinated me from the first moment I encountered them. Reading their words, I have had the strange experience of something at one and the same new and strange, and yet familiar. I have looked into the face of a stranger, and found a friend. I have encountered sayings that have forced me to think afresh about my own faith, I have seen rays from a source of light that I know well, though here refracted through a new prism.<sup>850</sup>

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<sup>850</sup> Tor Andrea, *In the Garden*, 4.

## *Appendix 1*

### *Chronology – A brief outline of de Beaurecueil's life and times*

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1917 | (August 28) born in Paris of Comte Pierre de Laugier de Beaurecueil and Roberte de Quelen.  |
| 1927 | Enrolls at l'École Gerson.  |
| 1930 | His parents officially divorced.<br>On a summer vacation at Mer-les-Bains in Normandie, he meets Abbé Aquity. Visits for the first time the Dominican priory of Saint Jacques in Paris.                             |
| 1935 | After his Baccalauréat, enters the novitiate of the French province in Amiens and receives the habit.   |
| 1936 | Pronounces his simple vows in the Order of Preachers. Sent to the Dominican studium at Le Saulchoir de Kain in Belgium for initial formation, where he meets Georges Anawati and Jacques Jomier for the first time. |
| 1939 | Military service in Djounieh (Lebanon).   |
| 1943 | Completes initial formation at Le Saulchoir d'Etiolles. On March 19, Cardinal Suhard ordains him to priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church on the Feast of St. Joseph.   |
| 1944 | Recalled back into the army and assigned as the chaplain of the famous Free French Armored Division.  |
| 1946 | Departs France to join Anawati and Jomier in Cairo to form the core team of the IDEO.   |
| 1946 | (April) Meets Osman Yaḥyā at the IDEO who introduces him to the works of 'Abdullāh Anṣārī. Begins his studies on Islamic mysticism with a focus on Anṣārī.  |
| 1952 | Meets Ravān Farhādī at Louis Massignon's house in Paris during a summer vacation.   |

- 1954 Marcel Levy Provençal visits the IDEO of Cairo and offers him an opportunity to visit Kabul.
- 1955 First travel to Afghanistan.
- 1961 Invited by the Afghan government on the occasion of the celebration of the 900<sup>th</sup> lunar anniversary of Anṣārī's death.
- 1962 Signs his first contract with the University of Kabul to teach the history of Islamic mysticism and techniques of editing manuscripts.
- 1965 Leaves the University of Kabul to teach French at Lycée Esteqlāl. Publishes, *Khwādja 'Abdullāh Anṣārī (396 - 481 H. / 1006 – 1089). Mystique Ḥanbalite* and *Nous avons partagé le pain et le sel*.
- 1968 Asked by the school administration at Esteqlāl to teach primary students and help improve the entire teaching curriculum. Publishes, *Prêtre des non-Chrétiens*.
- 1971 (February 11) Defends his *Doctorat d'État* at the Sorbonne.
- 1978 (April 28) The Afghan revolution starts.
- 1979 (December 27) The Soviet's invasion of Afghanistan.
- 1983 (August, 31) Expatriated for medical reasons from Kabul to Paris.
- 1985 Publishes *Un Chrétien en Afghanistan* and *Chemin de Dieu. Trois traités: spirituels d'Anṣārī*.
- 1986 Elected prior of the Dominican priory in Brussels. Publishes *Mes enfants de Kaboul*.
- 1988 Publishes *Anṣārī, Cris du Coeur*.
- 2001 Publishes *Chronique d'un témoin privilégié, vol. I, II, III*.
- 2005 (March 2) Dies in Rouen and is buried at the Abbey of Sylvanès.

## Appendix 2

### ***Chronology – A brief outline of Anṣārī's life and times***

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 1006        | (May 4) Anṣārī is born in Herāt.  |
| 1012        | Begins studies in Herāt at the Mālīnī school where he started reading the Qur'ān.   |
| 1014        | Begins the studies of ḥadīth under the tutelage of his father Abū Manṣūr and Jārūdī   |
| 1017        | Begins the studies of poetry and the memorization of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth  |
| 1017 - 1026 | Studies under five significant teachers: Shaykh 'Amū, Y. Ibn 'Ammār Shaybānī, 'Abdul-Jabbār Jarrāhī, and Tāqī Sijistānī and Bishrī Sijzī.   |
| 1026        | After the death of Tāqī Sijistānī, goes to Nīshāpūr for further study of fiqh and ḥadīth. Meets eminent Ṣūfī masters, such as Abū Naṣr Manṣūr, Aḥmad al-Mufasssīr, Abū Sa'īd Sayrafī, and Abū-l-Ḥassan Aḥmad Salīṭī |
| 1032        | Offers to accompany the elderly Imām Abū-l-Faḍl b. Sa'd of Herāt to Mecca for Ḥajj (first attempt failed)   |
| 1033        | Second unsuccessful attempt to go to Ḥajj. On his way back he meets Shaykh Kharaqānī in Nīshāpūr  |
| 1033 - 1042 | Teaching years in Herāt   |
| 1042 - 1053 | A decade of hardships: prohibition from teaching, exile from Herāt, imprisonment for five month in Pōshanj  |
| 1053 - 1064 | A decade of achievements: receives wide recognition and dictates <i>Ṣad maydān</i>  |
| 1064 - 1071 | Goes on public fight against 'innovators'-rationalist theologians and philosophers.   |
| 1071 - 1085 | Enjoys celebrity and grandeur. Dictates <i>Manāzil-al- sā'irīn</i> . He loses his sight at the age of 74 in 1080.   |

- 1085 - 1089 His last years of battles against ‘innovators’ and continues to dictate many of his treatises; the *Munājāt*, *Kashf al-asrār*, *‘Ilal al-Maqāmāt*.
- 1089 (March 8) Dies in Herāt and buried near the Khānqāh of Shaykh ‘Amū. His tomb very soon becomes a major shrine visited by pilgrims.



***Table 1 Anṣārī 's tomb in Herāt***

([http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/69/Herat\\_Anṣārī\\_tomb.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/69/Herat_Anṣārī_tomb.jpg))



*Table 2 de Beaurecueil's tomb at Abbey of Sylavanès.* (Courtesy Jean-Jacques Pérennès, 2009)





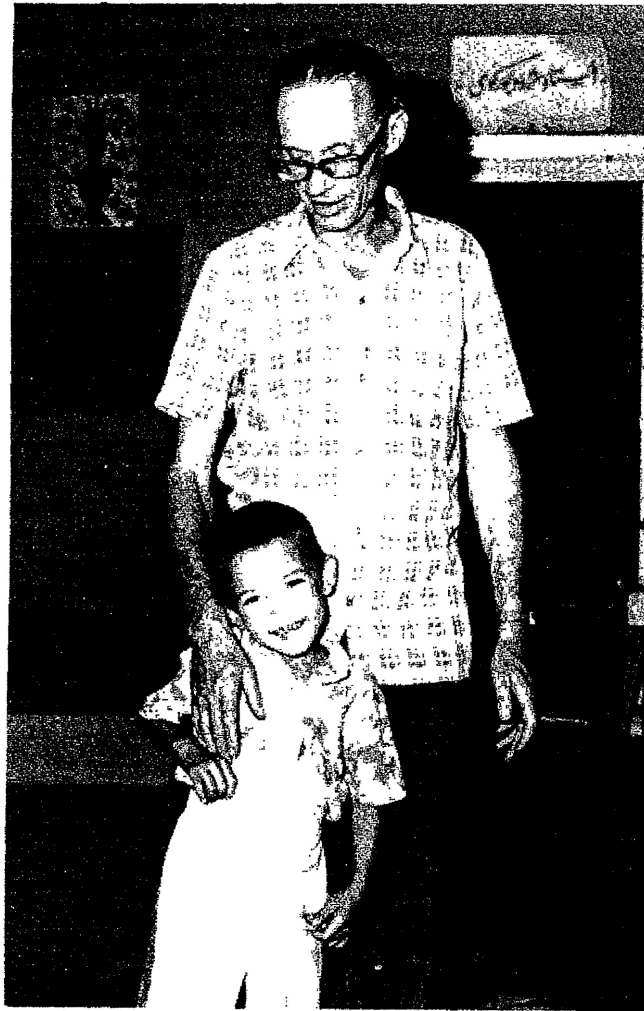
***Table 3 At the IDEO in Cairo (de Beaurecuel is 4<sup>th</sup> from the left)***  
(Courtesy AIDEO)



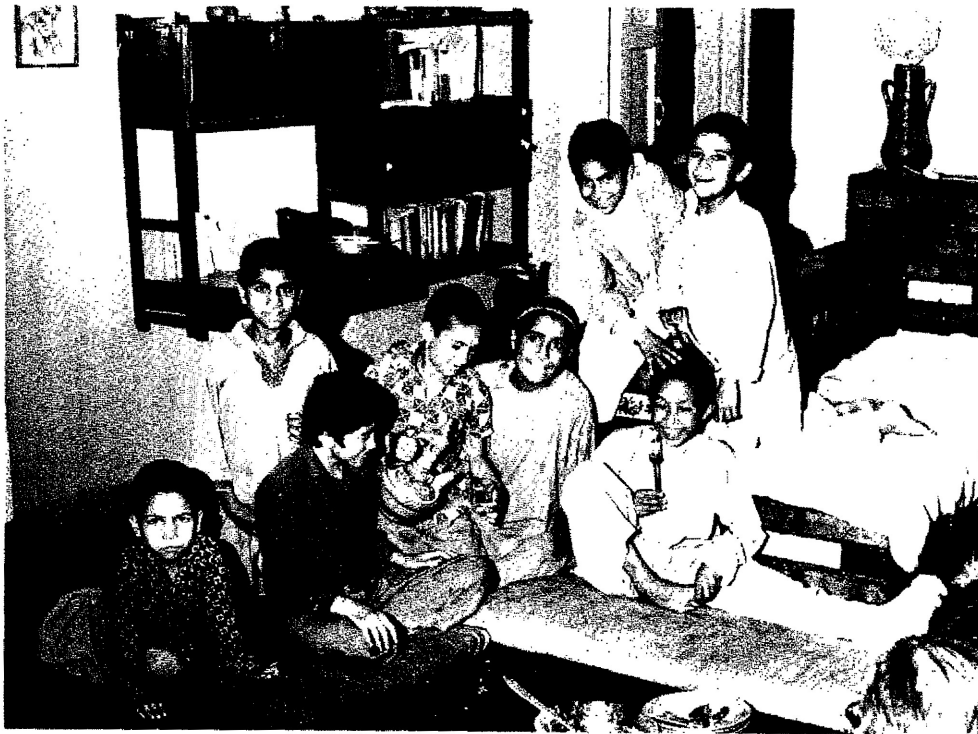
*Tales 4 de Beaurecueil in his chapel in Kabul* (Courtesy APF)



*Table 5 de Beaurecueil and his 'children'* (Courtesy Louis Duprée)



Serge with Farhad, a member of his family compound.



Some of the "family." Most are orphaned or have only one living parent. Four of those above have had medical care for crippling defects and diseases. Four are students at the Istiqlal School.

The older boy at right is Akbar Mohammed, who works in Kabul as a machinist. Having come to Serge at age 11, he now lives with an uncle but often returns to visit the compound.



(Courtesy André Gouzes)



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